

OPENING ADDRESS

11TH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON AIDS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ICAAP)

Ms Jan Beagle, Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS

18 November 2013

Bangkok, Thailand

**Opening address at the 11th International Congress
on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP)**

SPEECH

By: Ms Jan Beagle, Deputy Executive Director of UNAIDS

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Place: Bangkok, Thailand

Occasion: Opening address at the 11th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP)

Please check against delivery

Mr Chairman,

Your Excellency, the President of Fiji,

Your Excellency, the Minister of Health of Thailand,

Your Excellencies, Chairman of the Population and Community Development Association, and President of the AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific,

Government representatives, Members of Parliament,

Friends from the communities, and all our partners and colleagues,

I am very pleased to be here with you today, on behalf of UNAIDS.

This 11th Congress comes at a critical time.

We now have less than 800 days to reach the 10 targets of the 2011 Political Declaration.

Urgent action is required – and here I mean nothing less than a renewed focus on policies, programmes and investments – in many parts of the world, including here in Asia and the Pacific.

But it is also a critical time because the world is now debating the future development agenda and the AIDS response is not secure. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has called for the next development agenda to “realize the vision of a future free of AIDS”. But AIDS risks getting lost. The agenda is broad, complex and crowded and we should not be complacent.

Positioning AIDS in the post-2015 agenda is critical to continued visibility and support. Strategic positioning will require concerted efforts – particularly in Asia and the Pacific where the epidemic is concentrated and too often invisible to development practitioners.

AIDS is clearly relevant to the post-2015 agenda. It is much more than a health issue: it is a development issue, a human rights issue, an inequality issue, a gender issue. We know that effectively tackling AIDS is a long-term investment that pays dividends across all sectors of development. Experience has shown that AIDS is an entry point to advance broader issues such as human rights, redistribution of opportunities, and social justice for all. The AIDS response can be a pathfinder for transformative development.

So where are we now in our region?

This region is at a pivotal juncture. Important progress is being made towards reaching the global AIDS targets, but the pace of progress is too slow and significant challenges remain:

- New HIV infections have decreased by 26% since 2001. But the number of annual new infections has remained largely unchanged over the last five years, and emerging epidemics are becoming evident in a number of countries.
- There are very high HIV prevalence levels in some geographical areas, and among key populations. Yet in Asia and the Pacific, only about 8% of the overall AIDS spending is for HIV prevention for populations at highest risk.
- More people than ever before are receiving life-saving treatment, and nearly all the low-cost generics globally are supplied by this region, yet half the people eligible for treatment in this region do not have access to it.
- Asia-Pacific has some of the most organized and effective examples of community leadership on HIV in the world. People living with HIV, sex workers, men having sex with men, people who use drugs and transgender people are boldly stepping forward, driving the agenda and demonstrating the power of community in leading social change. But stigma and discrimination, and poor policies continue to wreak havoc on the lives of individuals living with, or affected by, HIV in all countries.

The AIDS response in Asia and the Pacific has seen some of the world's greatest successes.

So it is surprising that the region that produced so many early innovations seems to have stopped pushing the boundaries and continues to do more of the same. We will not get there without challenging the status quo.

Let me take a moment here to honour the memory of Shivanada Khan, our good friend and tireless crusader who we lost tragically earlier this year, who inspired us to always challenge the status quo.

This region can and must take a lead in identifying and promoting further innovations to scale up and speed up prevention, treatment, care and support.

Efforts must be focused in the right places to reach the people in greatest need.

Communities of people living with HIV and key populations at higher risk must continue to be central to all phases of the AIDS response—from design to delivery.

We need to remove punitive laws, policies and practices, which continue to hamper access to HIV services.

I want to note here that UNAIDS fully supports the rights of key populations to be free from stigma and discrimination and to ensure that the law fully entitles them to access the services they need.

Asia-Pacific must take advantage of its growing economic power to support the shared responsibility and global solidarity agenda.

Domestic financing for AIDS has risen and Asia has set an example for the world: 62% of AIDS spending in 2012 was from domestic sources. This trend must be sustained. External

partners also have an important role: to continue to invest and act as a catalyst for innovation and to strengthen national capacities.

We know that the end of AIDS will not be the result of a single biomedical intervention, but the result of a multisectoral response addressing broader socio-cultural, economic and political issues within a human rights framework.

What is often lacking, and what will make the real difference, is the willingness to make difficult decisions and see them fully applied.

It is the will and the courage to choose science over prejudice, respect for the human rights of our fellow citizens over our discomfort with their differences, and ambition in what we can achieve over complacency and inertia.

Dear colleagues, there is no time to lose.

Let's ensure that the strength, experience, resources and political will of Asia and the Pacific combine and focus to make every single day count.

Let us make ICAAP the pivotal point for Asia and the Pacific to turn the epidemic around.

Let us use ICAAP as a platform that defines what happens to AIDS in the Post-2015 development agenda.

Let us invest in innovation, in women and girls, and in young people as agents of change.

Let us stimulate a reenergized movement which, together with the International AIDS Conference in Melbourne, can leverage the AIDS response, in this region, and globally, as an entry point for people-centred development, respect for human rights and social transformation.

[END]

UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.