

## Response

### Response to the book *The AIDS Pandemic: the collision of epidemiology with political correctness*

**Geneva, 11 June 2007** –UNAIDS wishes to correct multiple mischaracterizations that appear in a book published by Radcliffe Publishing, entitled *The AIDS Pandemic: the collision of epidemiology with political correctness* by James Chin. These errors deal with the process and results of the estimations of the AIDS pandemic, made with technical assistance from the UNAIDS Secretariat and WHO.

An op-ed piece by Dr Chin, published in the San Francisco Chronicle in March 2007, summarizes the claims made in the book. Dr Chin wrote, “Many myths and misconceptions about the AIDS pandemic are spread by the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and other mainstream AIDS agencies and activists, either unintentionally out of ignorance or intentionally by distortion or exaggeration, including fear of a generalized epidemic.”

The underlining theme of Dr Chin’s book is incorrect. The UNAIDS Secretariat and WHO work with other partner organizations, as well as individual countries, to monitor the status of the AIDS epidemic and to guide the response to it. Estimates are not produced in isolation, but rather in close collaboration with world leading epidemiologists and national governments. The regularly reviewed methodology is based on recommendations of an international team of experts chaired by a leading academic from London University’s Imperial College, UK.<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS Secretariat and WHO data are not influenced by political or fundraising agendas.

The UNAIDS Secretariat and WHO have been open in publicizing the methods used to assess the magnitude of the past and current epidemic, and the evolution of these methods in the light of new data . In recent years, adjustments to earlier published estimates of prevalence, mortality and new infections for many countries have been presented in a transparent fashion, and the UNAIDS Secretariat and WHO expect there will be more adjustments as new data and methodological refinements become available.

Chin also asserts that there have not been significant heterosexual HIV epidemics in any Asian country and that UNAIDS is being alarmist in advocating for strong national responses in Asia. While the data show that levels of HIV prevalence in the general population of Asian countries have remained contained, concentrated epidemics of HIV affect female commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, injecting drug users, and the partners and children of those persons. Numerically, low prevalence epidemics in Asia still mean very

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<sup>1</sup> For full list of participants: [http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV\\_data/Epidemiology/reference\\_group\\_list.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV_data/Epidemiology/reference_group_list.asp)

large numbers of people affected and requiring appropriately targeted prevention and treatment services.

The AIDS response has always invited a high-level of debate and discussion. The UNAIDS joint programme welcomes this debate and stands by its scientific approach. The AIDS epidemic continues to evolve and the response must evolve accordingly. It's critical for countries to "know their epidemic" in order to focus HIV prevention, treatment and care programmes to reach those at highest risk of infection. UNAIDS will continue to use the best available data to advocate for the most effective response for the millions in need.

UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS' Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)