

Press release

Under embargo until 05.00 hrs GMT, 20 August 2007

UNAIDS calls for renewed vigour on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific

Colombo, 20 August 2007 – Asia-Pacific nations will face a serious challenge in sustaining their response to AIDS unless they become less reliant on external donors and commit more national funds and human resources to AIDS programmes, UNAIDS Asia Pacific Regional Director Prasada Rao said today.

Speaking at the opening session of the 8th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP), Rao said resources for national AIDS programs in Asia, while increasing, are insufficient for a durable response to AIDS. National governments' budgets for AIDS programmes in the region account for only 30% of the US\$ 1.2 billion of allocated funds for AIDS. With the exception of Thailand, international donors fund the balance.

Although prevalence rates remain low across the region, rates of new infections are rising in a number of countries such as Papua New Guinea, Vietnam, Indonesia, Nepal and Bangladesh.

“We need continued vigilance to ensure that HIV prevention and treatment are reaching people most at risk and most in need,” said Rao, warning against complacency.

Rao stated that achieving regional targets of Universal Access to HIV prevention treatment and care demands a sharply defined multi-sectored government response and a revitalized civil society to confront legal and social barriers that hinder access to HIV prevention and treatment services.

While applauding harm reduction policies in Malaysia, China and India, revived prevention efforts in Thailand, and outreach to men who have sex with men in Cambodia, Rao stressed that stigma and discriminatory laws still poses serious obstacles in the region and demanded that national policies focus on the “forgotten faces of the AIDS epidemic.”

Rao also expressed concern about the rise in political instability and conflict in many Asia Pacific countries which thwarts access to HIV prevention and treatment programmes; “Apart from the direct toll of human lives, conflict also exacerbates existing problems of poverty and displaces thousands, making them more vulnerable to health related problems.”

Concluding his speech, Rao called upon civil society groups—including people living with HIV—to continue and to increase pressure on governments to deliver concrete AIDS programmes.

Contact: **GE** Yasmine Topor +41 22 791 3501 topory@unaids.org
COL Bai Bagasao +94 7743 08720 bagasaob@unaids.org
BKK Jeanne Hallacy +66 86 003 2316 hallacy@loxinfo.co.th