



## Press Statement

### *For Immediate Release*

#### **UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CALLS FOR INCREASED COMMITMENT FROM INDIA'S NORTH EASTERN LEADERS**

##### ***Scale-up of HIV prevention and treatment efforts needed to slow and reverse AIDS epidemic, according to Dr. Peter Piot***

**Guwahati , 19 November 2005** – Today United Nations Under Secretary General and UNAIDS Executive Director, Dr Peter Piot underscored the role of political commitment in addressing the AIDS epidemic in the North Eastern region of India.

In a speech to the Parliamentary Forum on HIV/AIDS of the elected representatives from the North East, Dr. Piot called for an exceptional response to the exception challenge of AIDS. “AIDS is one of the most serious challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” said Dr. Piot. “ It is on par with global warming, massive poverty and terrorism.”

He outlined lessons the world has learned over the past 25 years. “The first and most important lesson is that AIDS is a problem with a solution,” he said. “Second, no amount of money can replace leadership.” Dr. Piot called on leaders in the North East to focus their efforts in addressing the epidemic by scaling up programs for the general public and also with groups most at risk. “Leadership on AIDS often requires going against the mainstream in society because we have to deal with issues that are taboo for many people, including sex and drugs.”

He outlined the need for a comprehensive and coordinated AIDS response that includes HIV prevention and treatment. “For the North East, it means that harm reduction policies need to be implemented in every state and every city—including access to clean needles, substitution therapy and services that are accessible by women and young people,” he said.

“How we do things is as important as what we do,” was the last point Dr Piot made. “A multisectoral response that engages many ministries and sectors is necessary. Also it is critical that people living with HIV and people most at risk for HIV, such as sex workers, men who have sex with men and injecting drug users, be centrally involved in the AIDS response.” He stressed the need to tackle stigma and discrimination head on.

Dr Piot appealed to the Chief Ministers to personally lead their State AIDS Control Societies and monitor the state's response on a quarterly basis. Finally Dr Piot offered the support of UNAIDS in strengthening the regional response. UNAIDS will set up a regional centre to offer technical assistance and support for government led efforts. UNAIDS will join the efforts of its cosponsors UNODC and UNICEF, which are already working in the region.

Today's high-level meeting brought together Chief Ministers and ministers from the eight North Eastern states of India and more than 100 elected representatives for a day-long deliberation on the AIDS response.

In addition Union ministers, brought their support to the meeting including, Mr M. Khindya, Minister of Tribal Affairs, Mrs Panabaka Laxmi, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, and Mr Oscar Fernandes, Minister of Youth and Sports, and National Convener of the Parliamentary Forum on HIV/AIDS. A declaration outlining the way forward for regional action was signed and adopted by the participants.

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