



Asian Consultation on the Prevention of HIV Related to Drug Use

## Educating Policymakers on Effective Strategies in Achieving Universal Access of Harm Reduction Programmes



Left to right: Ms. Mariette Correa from the Local Organizing Committee; Mrs. Fernandes; Mr. Oscar Fernandes, State Minister of Labor and Employment; Mr. JVR Prasada Rao, Regional Director of UNAIDS; Mr. John Godwin, HIV Adviser of AusAID; and Mr. Luke Samson, co-Chair of the Consultation. Photo: Response Beyond Borders

*For the first time in Asia, 400 HIV/AIDS service providers, Injecting Drug Users (IDU), parliamentarians and policy makers from 27 countries gathered for the Asian Consultation on Prevention of HIV Related to Drug Use – organized by the Asian Consortium on Drug Use, HIV/AIDS and Poverty in Goa, India on 28-31 January. The meeting reviewed the existing shortcomings in drug policies, and presented viable solutions to prevent HIV among IDUs.*

### **Injection drug use is the main mode of HIV transmission in the region**

The opening session was addressed by Ms. Mariette Correa from the Local Organizing Committee. "The conference addresses Asia's vulnerability to drug use and HIV/AIDS, and the social hazards of criminalization and incarceration of IDUs", said Mr. Luke Samson, co-Chair of the consultation. With injection drug use as the main mode of HIV transmission in the region, Mr. John Godwin, HIV Adviser of AusAID, emphasized that the conference helped shape governments' responses to the spread of HIV among 7.5 million IDUs that live in Asia-Pacific. "Regional

collaboration for HIV prevention is the most effective mechanism to combat the growing pandemic", stated Mr. Oscar Fernandes, State Minister of Labor and Employment, adding that the consultation is an opportunity to generate solutions on HIV/AIDS issues affecting IDUs.

### **UNODC develops workplans to scale up harm reduction**

Opioid Substitution Treatment (OST) and needle-syringe programmes improve the overall health status of HIV-infected IDUs and reduce their drug-related HIV risk behaviors. "UNODC provides assistance in developing workplans for scaling up the treatment. We need to ensure drug users' participation in OST delivery programme and to prevent the spread of HIV among prisoners", stressed Mr. Gary Lewis, Regional Representative of UNODC.

### **Review laws that criminalize drug-use**

Mr. JVR Prasada Rao, Regional Director of UNAIDS, stated, "Parliamentarians are urged to review laws that criminalize drug-use; to tackle stigma associated

with drug use and HIV; to ensure coverage of IDUs on prevention, treatment and care interventions; to involve networks of drug users and community-based organizations in the delivery of HIV services; to maximize financial and technical resources of HIV programmes for IDUs; and to promote organizations of people who use drugs".

### **Drug policy and reform**

Mr. Sujatha Rao, Director General of the National AIDS Control Organization in India, chaired the plenary session on "Drug Policy and Reform". Mr. Paul Bekkers, AIDS Ambassador of Netherlands, presented the human rights and evidence-based approaches towards drug policy and reform. Mr. Swarup Sarkar of the Asian Development Bank spoke on the ground reality of the responses to drug-related HIV and poverty. Mr. Chris Puplick, Chair of the Australia National Council on AIDS, Hepatitis C and Related Diseases; Ms. Tasnim Azim, Head of the International Center for Diarrhoeal Disease Research in Bangladesh; and Mr. Shiba Phurailatpam, Regional Coordinator of the Asia-Pacific Network Plus; also spoke at the session.

*"The main challenge in the next two years is to increase the access of IDUs in need of HIV prevention and treatment services. Everybody needs to work together to scale up harm reduction programmes."*

**Mr. JVR Prasada Rao, Regional Director of UNAIDS**





Left to right: Mr. Bijaya Pandey, Drug User Representative of Nepal; Mr. Fredy Edi, Member of the Indonesian Network of People Who Use Drugs; Senator SM Zafar of Pakistan; Mr. Nurul Eddy Pariang, MP (Indonesia); Mr. Paul Bekkers, AIDS Ambassador of Netherlands; and Ms. Tripti Tandon of the Lawyer's Collective in India. Photo: Response Beyond Borders

Despite the benefits from harm reduction, approaches to HIV prevention among Injecting Drug Users (IDU) are low in Asia and they need to be scaled up. A forum of parliamentarians, policymakers and drug users was staged during the first Asian Consultation on the Prevention of HIV Related to Drug Use to tackle the issues of criminalization, stigma and discrimination that marginalize drug users, drive them underground, and deter their access to HIV prevention and treatment services.

#### Drug users are treated as criminals and sub-human beings

**Mr. Bijaya Pandey**

*Drug User Representative of Nepal*

During the panel, several drug users informed the participants of the reality in the ground. Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) and needle-syringe exchange programmes are not operating and illegal in most Asian countries, only few countries support these programmes. While UN is aiming for 80 percent Universal Access of IDU population by 2010, the criminalization of IDUs and the lack of policy framework on drugs mean that IDUs and service providers are at risk of accessing or providing existing services. "Drug users are treated as criminals and sub-human beings. These serve as reminders of the reality face by us who need these services", underlined Mr. Bijaya Pandey, Drug User Representative of Nepal.

#### The 'war on drugs' has caused the rise in HIV infections among IDUs

**Mr. Fredy Edi**

*Member of the Indonesian Network of People Who Use Drugs*

"The 'war on drugs' is also a war on health. Many IDUs are told that they must stop taking drugs before they can receive Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART)

## Decriminalize Drug Users

Parliamentarians, Policymakers and Drug User Forum

from service centers", added Mr. Fredy Edi, Member of the Indonesian Network of People Who Use Drugs. There is an evidence that the 'war on drugs' has caused the rise in HIV and hepatitis infections among IDUs.

#### Stigma and discrimination intensify when we talk about drugs

**Ms. Tripti Tandon**

*Lawyer's Collective in India*

"Once IDUs are incarcerated, they lose their freedom to health care. The stigma and discrimination that are associated with People Living With HIV (PLWHIV) are intense, but when we talk about drugs, the discrimination intensifies. PLWHIV and drug users are underserved of health care", said Ms. Tripti Tandon of the Lawyer's Collective in India, adding that her own organization fights hard against stigma to ensure that people with HIV and in prison have access to ART. "After three years of hard labor, we succeeded; however, this created an uproar in the community because of that perception", she informed.

#### When the issue of female IDUs is raised, the problem is greater

**Ms. Tamara Speed**

*Treatment and Policy Manager of the Australian Intravenous League*

When the issues associated with IDUs are discussed, stigma and discrimination are among the main concerns. "When the issue of female IDUs is raised, the problem is greater. When quitting fails

and women relapse, higher level of stigma and discrimination are being placed upon them. Services for IDUs are mainly male-oriented. I express concern over the lack of harm reduction approaches, drop-in centers and programmes to cater women's needs. Women need to be informed of the services that can meet their special needs. Illiteracy limit womens' understanding of their basic rights", said Ms. Tamara Speed, Treatment and Policy Manager of the Australian Intravenous League.

Governments want drug users to be productive citizens yet they are treated with disdain. What drug users need from the parliamentarians are supports for treatment, for diversity of services and for flexibility of mechanisms used to access those services.

#### Parliamentarians to forge partnerships with NGOs

**Mr. Paul Bekkers**

*AIDS Ambassador of Netherlands*

Mr. Paul Bekkers, AIDS Ambassador of Netherlands, agreeing that the parliamentarians have an important role to play in the fight against drug abuse, said, "Politicians should help to forge partnerships with NGOs to meet the Universal Access targets by 2010. Meaningful consultation such as this is rare in Asia, where marginalized communities feel that they can share their views without being discriminated. Improving the collaboration between IDUs and the government officials is an important step towards developing effective interventions".

The key speakers of the forum were Ms. Doreen Massey, MP (UK); Mr. Roque Ablan Jr., MP (Philippines); Senator SM Zafar of Pakistan; and Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director of AFPPD.

*"Politicians should help forge partnerships with NGOs to successfully meet the Universal Access targets by 2010. Improving the collaboration between IDUs and the government officials is an important step towards developing sustainable and effective interventions."*

**Mr. Paul Bekkers, AIDS Ambassador of Netherlands**

# “Parliamentarians Need to Take Lead Against Stigma and Discrimination Among Injecting Drug Users”

AFPPD’s Parliamentarian Workshop on the Promotion of Political Will for HIV/AIDS and Drugs’ Prevention and Treatment Adopts a Statement of Commitment



Parliamentarians (left to right): Mr. Mamadsho Ilolov of Tajikistan, Senator Serik Ayaganov of Kazakhstan, Ms. Niiazalieva Damira of Kyrgyzstan, Mr. Phonethep Pholsena of Laos, Mr. Ahmad Khas Ahmadi of Iran, Mr. Nurul Eddy Pariang of Indonesia and Mr. Rajitha Senaratne of Sri Lanka. Photo: AHRN

*To involve, educate and motivate parliamentarians on highlighting the inter-relationship of HIV/AIDS and drugs; AFPPD arranged a parliamentarian staff workshop in Chiang Mai, Thailand to seek their opinions and to educate them on drug-related issues. The Asian Harm Reduction Network (AHRN) and the Asian Consortium on Drug Use, HIV/AIDS and Poverty invited AFPPD to organize a parliamentarian workshop at the Asian Consultation on Prevention of HIV Related to Drug Use. More than 10 parliamentarians from Asia and Central Asia participated in the workshop.*

## Indonesian parliament includes harm reduction strategies in HIV/AIDS budget

**Mr. Nurul Eddy Pariang  
MP (Indonesia)**

The parliamentarians’ responses to HIV/AIDS related to drug use in Indonesia was presented by Mr. Nurul Eddy Pariang, MP (Indonesia). With 193,000 Indonesians vulnerable towards HIV infection, it was reported that there are 11,000 AIDS cases in 2007 and 250 new HIV detected cases from October to December in 2007. Fifty percent of the HIV-infected population are IDUs, most are males at the age range of 20-29. “The Indonesian Forum of

Parliamentarians on Population and Development plays a major role in this situation. It disseminated information to the parliamentarians on the latest HIV/AIDS situation, and the national strategy in HIV/AIDS prevention and care; reviewed laws on HIV/AIDS, health, and narcotic and psychotropic drugs; called for actions to initiate local regulations on the endemic; and conducted HIV/AIDS dialogues between the young people and parliamentarians. Parliamentarians need to allocate a budget for HIV/AIDS and to include harm reduction strategies in the bills to prevent the spread of HIV”, he said.

## Cambodia’s HIV prevalence among the adult population dropped due to parliamentarian leadership

**Senator Chhit Kim Yeat  
Cambodia**

The geographic location of Cambodia makes the country a trading ground for illicit drugs. Statistics show that there are 43,000 drug addicts in the country – most of them are low-income workers, sex workers and students. Cambodia’s concern is the rapid increase of HIV/AIDS and hepatitis transmissions through injecting drug use and unprotected sex. The country’s HIV prevalence among the adult population dropped from 3.3 percent in 1997 to 0.9 in 2006 due to the good political commitment and

leadership of the parliamentarians. “We passed a law on the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in 2002, and we promote HIV awareness to the public”, highlighted Senator Chhit Kim Yeat of Cambodia.

## Laos has education programme on HIV/AIDS for parliamentarians

**Mr. Phonethep Pholsena  
MP (Laos)**

In his speech, Mr. Phonethep Pholsena, MP (Laos), said that Laos is classified as a low prevalence country, with less than 1 percent of its population is HIV/AIDS infected. Although the spread of the endemic has not reached an alarming level, the Lao parliamentarians recognize the possibility that the virus will spread rapidly. New cases of HIV infection increased from 1 percent in 2001 to 2.5 percent in 2006. The total estimated population of drug users in Laos is 35,000 and most of them are at the age of 15-19. “To respond to this threat, the government has formulated a task force – jointly chaired by the Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision, and the Ministry of Health – that implements policies on HIV/AIDS and drug control. The government also organizes HIV/AIDS seminars for parliamentarians to enhance their role in making new laws.

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Left to right: Ms. Doreen Massey, MP (United Kingdom); Mr. David Daniels, Director of YozuMannion Pty. Ltd; Mr. Ton Smits, Director of the AHRN; Ms. Nerissa Corazon Ruiz, MP (Philippines); Mr. Roque Ablan Jr., MP (Philippines); and Senator Chhit Kim Yeat of Cambodia. Photo: Response Beyond Borders

## Reducing Maternal and Child Mortality Emphasized at the South Asian Parliamentarians Meeting on MDG 5

**Haryana, January 10-11:** A conference on “South Asian Parliamentarians Meet on Achievements of MDGs – Focus on Maternal Mortality (MDG5)” was organized by the Indian Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IAPPD), in association with UNFPA and UNMC. Parliamentarians from South Asia; bureaucrats; academicians; and representatives of the media and NGOs participated in the meeting.

Mr. P.J. Kurien, Chair of the Standing Committee of IAPPD; Mr. Minar Pimple, Deputy Director of UNMC, Asia-Pacific; Mr. Wazim Zaman, Director of UNFPA-

CST, Kathmandu; Mr. Sat Mahajan, Chair of IAPPD; and Mr. Virendra Kataria; attended the meeting.

Mr. Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Chief Minister of Haryana, said that the state has introduced a number of schemes to reduce the maternal and child mortality rates, and to promote safe delivery practices in the rural areas. “Client-friendly maternal health programmes and more medical staff during birth delivery are high priorities in the state. We take initiative to improve the obstetric care services and to ensure that the medical institutions have health officers after working hours”, he said. The maternal

and infant mortality rates in Haryana have decreased since 1999 – from 302 per 100,000 women to 162 and from 61 per 1,000 live births to 42, respectively. The institutional delivery rate and the natal service use have increased since 1999 – from 22 to 39 percent and from 58 to 89 percent, respectively.

Various determinants and consequences of maternal health were discussed in the conference. Ms. Girja Vyas, Chair of the National Commission for Women in India, lauded the government for providing the infrastructure and money to reduce maternal and child mortality rates.



South Asian parliamentarians at the meeting. Photo: IAPPD

### Making HIV Awareness and Treatment Available in Kazakhstan

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Kazakhstan has a low HIV prevalence rate, at 0.2 percent, mostly 15-49 years old IDUs. “The national strategies to be implemented to achieve Universal Access by 2010 are to propagate HIV awareness and to make ART available to the public. Kazakhstan worries in the spread of the disease among drug users so the country develops international cooperation with NGOs”, informed Senator Serik Ayaganov.

Parliamentarians: Mr. Ahmad Khas Ahmadi of Iran; Ms. Niazaliev Damira of Kyrgyzstan; Ms. Nerissa Corazon Ruiz and Mr. Roque Ablan Jr. of Philippines; Mr. Rajitha Senaratne of Sri Lanka; and Mr. Mamadsho Ilolov of Tajikistan; presented their respective country reports. Other speakers of the workshop

included Mr. David Daniels, Director of Youzmannion Pty. Ltd., and Ms. Doreen Massey, MP (United Kingdom).

**Develop programmes for HIV prevention and treatment, and implement policies to decriminalize IDUs.**

Mr. Ton Smits  
Executive Director of AHRN

Mr. Ton Smits, Executive Director of AHRN, said, “Harmonizing the policy is critical for the effectiveness of interventions for IDUs in Asia”. The resulted statement of commitment called to develop policies and programmes aimed at decriminalizing IDUs; to develop HIV education, prevention and treatment programmes for IDUs; and to encourage the public to make behavior change.

### UN Population Award Goes to FCI and Ms. Miller

The Family Care International (FCI) and Ms. Billie Antoinette Miller, MP (Barbados) won this year’s United Nations Population Award. Ms. Miller was the President of the Inter-American Parliamentary Group on Population and Development, Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and Minister of the Foreign Affairs in Barbados.

FCI is a NGO that works to make pregnancy and childbirth safe, and to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS in developing countries. Chaired by Ms. Jill Sheffield, it organized the landmark conference, Women Deliver, in London, UK on October, 2007. The conference, aimed to generate new global commitments to maternal health, was attended by 2,000 participants from 110 nations.

## Focused on the Impacts of Sexual and Reproductive Health Policy, Commodity and Supply in Niger's Growth



European parliamentarians and Nigerian policymakers at the study tour. Photo: EPF

Hosted by the Nigerian Parliamentary Network on Population and Development, the study tour included visits to the youth centers dealing with SRH. The youth center provides condoms; and educates the youth on livelihood skills, nutrition, HIV/AIDS and family planning. The delegation also visited hospitals that focus in obstetric fistula, which is dramatically high in the country. In Niger,

**Niamey, February 5-11:** The European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), and the Equilibres and Populations organized a study tour for European parliamentarians – to focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) policies, commodities and supplies; and their impacts in a country's population and development growth. The parliamentary delegation – consisted of Mr. Karl Addicks of Germany, Mr. Françoise Castex of

France, Mr. David Edward Lea of UK, Mr. Michel Terrot of France and Ms. Hilde Vautmans of Belgium – was introduced to the country's successes and challenges on SRH and population growth, through working sessions with UNFPA-Niger and World Bank. The meetings were attended by the local government officials, parliamentarians, technical experts, religious leaders, and the representatives of NGOs and UN agencies.

the contraception use is at 5 percent rate and new fistula cases reach 2000 yearly – due to early pregnancy. The visiting parliamentarians were impressed by the strategic planning in the population growth and maternal health care sector in Niger, and they emphasized the need to strengthen the parliamentary budgets in addressing the country's financial and human resource challenges. The delegation committed to help shape future aid policies in Niger.

### Financing for Gender Equality and Parliamentary Taskforce on UN Affairs Launched by the European Forum



Ms. Mechthild Rawert (left), MP (Germany), and Mr. Neil Datta, Secretary of EPF. Photo: EPF

**New York, February 27:** A parliamentary dialogue on "Financing for Gender Equality" was hosted by the European Parliamentary Forum on Population and Development (EPF), in parallel to the 52nd session of UN Commission on the Status of Women. The dialogue aimed to provide a platform for discussion between the decision-makers and civil society on the role of the parliamentarians and stakeholders in formulating innovative financing commitments for gender equality and empowerment of women, and in

incorporating gender perspectives in the economic policies. EPF also launched its "Parliamentary Taskforce on UN Affairs" during the session.

#### AFPPD Participation

Ms. Chieko Nohno, MP (Japan); Ms. Joanna Spratt, Manager of the Family Planning International Development; and Ms. Jane Singleton, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Reproductive Health Alliance; attended the dialogue. EPF was represented by 10 European parliamentarians.

### US Population Increased 2 Percent, Highest in 45 Years

**Atlanta, January 16:** For the first time in 45 years, the United States' (US) population had climbed high enough to replace and support the ageing population. With the 2 percent birth increase between 2005 and 2006, resulting to 4.3 million births in 2006, the US fertility rate was higher than Australia, Canada, Japan and any country in Europe. Economic prosperity, immigration and better job security are some of the reasons behind the population boom in US.

### Erratum

In the article "AFPPD's Brainstorming Meeting on Parliamentary Advocacy for MDGs, Parliamentarians' Role in Accountable and Transparent Governance Vital for the Achievement of MDGs" in page 4 of our November-December 2007, we are clarifying that the report "People's Voices on MDGs" was a publication by the UN Millennium Campaign and not a joint publication of UNDP, UNESCAP and the Asian Development Bank.

## Population and Reproductive Health Focused by the New Zealand Parliamentary Group



Left to right: Tolofuaivalelei Falemoe Leiatua, Speaker of Samoa; Mr. Atapana Siakimotu, Speaker of Niue; Ms. Lesley Soper, MP (New Zealand); Mr. Ropati Lemamea, MP (Samoa); Ms. Ann Hartley, MP (New Zealand); Ms. Jill Pettis, MP (New Zealand) and Chair of NZPPD; Mr. John Tangi, MP (Cook Islands); Mr. Havea Tu'ihateiho, MP (Tonga); and Mr. Viliami Helu, MP (Tonga). Photo: NZPPD

**Auckland, January 20-24:** About 200 parliamentarians from 27 Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF) member countries worked out resolutions on politics, security, economics, environment, law, culture and education. They passed a joint communique and 23 resolutions. The New Zealand Parliamentarians' Group on Population and Development

(NZPPD) briefed the participants – including parliamentarians, government officials and NGO representatives – on population and development issues, as the focus areas of APPF, and on the role of parliamentarians in these issues. Ms. Margaret Wilson, Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives and President of APPF, opened the parliamentary forum.

## IFAD's President Mr. Bage at the Vietnamese Parliamentarian Forum's Meeting



Photo: IISD

**Hanoi, January 14-18:** Mr. Lennart Bage, President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), pledged support to tackle hunger and poverty; and to boost the socio-economic development in Vietnam. His visit was aimed to discuss with the local leaders matters of common concern – like the agricultural development cooperation programmes between Vietnam and IFAD, the agricultural actualities and the impacts of climate change in the country's agricultural production. Mr.

Bage signed a 40 million USD aid agreement to help projects for the poor villagers, to offer loans for the small businesses, to provide training on livelihood skills, and to improve the production of agriculture in the country. To boost bilateral relations, IFAD will setup a representative office in Vietnam.

Mr. Bage spoke at the Vietnamese Association of Parliamentarians on Population and Development's "Parliamentarian Meeting on Poverty Strategy, Healthcare Policy for Poverty and Rural People" – that was attended by 40 parliamentarians, government officials, and representatives of the media and NGOs. He delivered a presentation on the importance of agriculture in meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Ms. Farhana Rahman, Chief of the Media Relations, Special Events and Programmes of IFAD, also participated in the meeting.

## IN BRIEF

### Development Forum in Thailand Taking Shape

**Bangkok, February 22:** A development forum – aimed to discuss the experiences and challenges on issues related to development – is taking shape in Thailand. More than 20 development professionals and researchers from various NGOs, UN agencies and universities participated in the forum. The first meeting was held under the chairmanship of Mr. Muhammad Musa, Regional Director of CARE; moderated by Mr. John Samuel, International Director of ActionAid. AFPPD was represented by Programme Associates: Ms. Passawee Tapasanan and Ms. Carla Benham.

### Indonesian Forum Branch Formed in West Java

**West Java, December 27-January 3:** The Indonesian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IFPPD) established two local forums in Tasikmalaya and Bandung of West Java. The inauguration was addressed by Mr. Ruzhanul Ulum, Chair of IFPPD-Tasikmalaya; Mr. Hakim Sorimuda Pohan, Vice-Chair of IFPPD; and Mr. HMQ Isawara, Chair of IFPPD-West Java.

### 40th Session of CEDAW Discussed Women Rights

**Geneva, January 14 – February 1:** The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) held its 40th session to examine how countries are implementing their obligations under the CEDAW convention. The committee discussed issues on women's rights and empowerment, and highlighted the accomplishments and shortcomings in the implementation of CEDAW.

### US 2009 Budget to Cut 30 Percent on Sexual and Reproductive Health

**Washington DC, February 4:** US President George Bush's proposal for Fiscal Year 2009 will cut 30 percent of funding on the international family planning, and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) programmes. The reduction will occur despite the growing need for SRH care in the developing countries. It will have a devastating effect to women who rely on family planning services, and it will increase the rate of pregnancies and HIV infections.

## FACE TO FACE

# “The Influence of Religion on Sexual and Reproductive Health has Lessened in Australia but it Remains Strong Among Political Partners”

Robert Oakeshott of New South Wales, MP (Australia)

**What are the achievements and aberrations of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Right (SRHR) movements in your country?**

Sexual and Reproductive and Health (SRH) is an integral part of the health programme in Australia. The government has raised the budget for the international aid and development by nearly 4 percent in the current fiscal year, which is an indication of the government's concern. The most interesting part, that for the first time, SRH is mentioned in the budget. As far as SRH in Australia is concerned, a draft framework has been prepared by a coalition of health advocacy organizations to deal with it at the national level, rather than at the state level (Australia is a federation of states with some health matters being dealt at the state level). The framework is comprehensive and evidence-based, and it will be released for discussion early next year. It would be up to the government to decide how it will respond.

**The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) had articulated bold visions about the relationship between the population and development. After 13 years, has your government fully implemented ICPD's Programme of Action (PoA)?**

The government makes efforts but there is a long way to go in implementing PoA of ICPD. The biggest challenge is to check the growing Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) in Southeast Asia and Pacific. So, it's an appropriate time to start the campaign against MMR.

**Religious beliefs have always come in the way of implementing the policies relating to the family planning and reproductive health. In such a situation, how can the reproductive rights of the people be protected?**

The influence of religion in SRH has lessened in Australia; although, it is still very strong in both major parties and still disproportionate to the views of the

general public.

**What steps have been taken to check the growing violence against women in your country?**

Several steps have been taken to check the violence against women. For instance, there is a strong community network of preventative programme called 'Families First'. Then in most Australian communities, there is a women network for crisis accommodation. Besides, there are strong laws upheld by the police and the courts in relation to the violence against women. It is still a difficult and a challenging problem but we are working hard to address this issue.

**Are women and youth really empowered in your country?**

Yes. Women and youth are empowered in Australia but there is a need to do more. Parliamentarians can play an important role in this by engaging more women and youth in the community development programmes, and by making friendly policies for them.

SRHR of gays is important, same with 'straight' young men and women. After all, they are part of the society. Therefore, it is the duty of the health care providers to address issues that affect their health.

**How active is the media in SRH advocacy programme? Do you think it plays any role in this programme?**

Media has been playing a critical role in the advocacy programme in SRH but they should do more.

**There are many myths about sexuality among young people. Should sex education be added in the school curriculum?**

Sex education is part of the Australian school curriculum but it's not mandatory. Individual schools often decide what's taught in the classroom. Personal



development, relationship-building, sex education and tolerance of others are all important lessons in life.

**Do you agree that the lack of political commitment has always pushed back efforts relating to SRHR?**

Yes. I would say it's the pressure from the community that generates the political will or commitment. So, we need to find ways to engage the community and get them apply pressure on the politicians. With no community pressure, politicians will do nothing. On a positive note, I am very pleased that 10 parliamentarians are present at the conference, and all agreed to sign a joint letter urging governments of the Asia-Pacific to improve the health standards of women during pregnancy and child-bearing.

**What message are you taking from the Hyderabad Conference?**

The presence of a large number of NGOs at the conference has compelled me to think why governments are deaf? Why don't they act? I think prevention is better than dealing with the consequences. I strongly believe in the forums of parliamentarians from different countries, discussing SRH issue and evolving SRH strategies. Parliamentarians should tell their respective government to increase its funding and commitment. I would say that the parliamentarians should support each other in this matter. I must say, the way India has dealt with family planning is amazing. I will certainly share my experiences with the parliamentarians.

- Interviewed by Ms. Anju Grover

## Millennium Development Goals and Human Rights Lagging in Asia-Pacific Despite the Economic Growth

**Bangkok, January 16:** A panel presentation on the key priority concerns for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and human rights was organized by the UN Information Center (UNIC)-Bangkok – focused on how these issues resonate throughout Asia-Pacific and

why Asia is lagging in meeting the MDGs despite the economic progress. The open forum, “MDGs and Human Rights in Asia-Pacific – the Way Forward”, was attended by the UN officials, experts, and the representatives of NGOs and civil society. The panelists

were Ms. Shalini Dewan, Director of UNIC-India; Mr. Homayoun Alizadeh, Regional Representative for Southeast Asia of OHCHR; Ms. Thelma Kay, Director of the Emerging Social Issues Division of UNESCAP; Mr. Minar Pimple, Deputy Director of UNMC, Asia-Pacific; Ms. Sarah Ireland, Regional Director of Oxfam, Great Britain; Mr. Raj Kumar, Principal Officer of UNESCAP; and Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director of AFPPD. The panel was chaired by Mr. Kiyo Akasaka, UN Under Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.



Left to right: Ms. Sarah Ireland, Director of Oxfam, Great Britain; Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director of AFPPD; Ms. Shalini Dewan, Director of UNIC-India; Mr. Kiyo Akasaka, UN Under Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information; Mr. Homayoun Alizadeh, Regional Representative for Southeast Asia of OHCHR; Ms. Thelma Kay, Director of the Emerging Social Issues Division of UNESCAP; and Mr. Minar Pimple, Deputy Director of UNMC, Asia-Pacific. Photo: UNESCAP

### Task-Shifting Conference to Scale up the HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment in Africa

**Addis Ababa, January 8:** More than 350 participants from 57 countries attended the conference on task-shifting – to scale up the access to HIV/AIDS treatment and to expand the global health workforce in countries having a shortage of health workers. The event was hosted by the government of Ethiopia; and co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO), the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS and UNAIDS. At the conference, WHO presented the guidelines to assist

African countries in implementing task-shifting. The guidelines, resulted from the consultation of 167 public health and HIV/AIDS experts, are based from the experiences and programme evaluations in countries where task shifting has been implemented. Task-shifting aims to ‘free up’ the time of the physicians and nurses by allowing ‘less specialized’ health workers to provide HIV/AIDS services in the medical centers and community. It costs 7 billion USD for over five years.

### Afghanistan Tackles Child Marriages Among Girls

**Kabul, January 4:** Fifty seven percent of Afghan marriages involve girls under 16 and 80 percent of marriages in the country are arranged. The risk of death during pregnancy and childbirth for girls under 14 years old is five times higher compared to an adult. Afghanistan has taken steps to tackle the problem by changing the legal age for marriage of girls to 17. Local NGOs also started awareness campaigns throughout the country to promote children's right to education and self-determination.

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