

THE
ASIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS' WORKSHOP
ON HIV/AIDS
WITH FOCUS ON
ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

JANUARY 24-25, 2007
BANGKOK



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The Asian Parliamentarians' Workshop on HIV/AIDS with Focus on Accountability and Transparency was organised by the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“The Asian Parliamentarians’ Workshop on HIV/AIDS with a Focus on Accountability and Transparency”, hosted over thirty parliamentarians and ministers from fourteen Asian nations. Held in Bangkok on January 24-25, 2006 and organized by the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (AFPPD) in cooperation with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the workshop discussed issues arising from HIV/AIDS.

During the workshop, many experts from the government sector, UNFPA, UNAIDS, FHI and NGOs were invited to speak on several topics concerning this subject, including why the epidemic is not under control, the relationship of accountability and transparency to controlling HIV/AIDS, and the roles of parliamentarians in such advocacy.

The workshop consisted of 7 sessions:

- An Overview of the HIV/AIDS Situation in the Asia Pacific Region
- Why the HIV/AIDS Epidemic is Not Under Control?
- HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health - the Critical Linkages
- Advocacy for Accountability and Transparency in all Levels of Society
- Funding, Accountability and Transparency - the Relationships
- Accountability and Transparency: What is Their Role in Controlling the HIV/AIDS Epidemic
- What Can Parliamentarians Do?

The workshop brought about new ideas and topics of discussion, with attending parliamentarians making personal commitments, some of which include reporting back to their national committees on the issues raised at this conference; trying to get more involved with all levels of society, particularly with NGOs, the private sector and HIV positive people; promoting the implementation of HIV/AIDS laws and regulations in their home countries; and maximizing the effective function of the government and related state departments in relationship to the implementation of these policies.

PROGRAMME

TUESDAY 23RD JANUARY 2007

Arrival and Registration

WEDNESDAY 24TH JANUARY 2007

9:00-10:00 WELCOME REMARKS AND OPENING CEREMONY

Ms. Malinee Sukavejworakit,
Hon. Potjanee Thanavaranit,

Secretary-General, AFPPD
2nd Vice President, Thai
National Legislative Assembly

Mr. Chaiyos Kunanusont

HIV/AIDS/STI Adviser, UNFPA, CST
Bangkok

10:00-10:15 GROUP PHOTO

10:15-10:30 COFFEE BREAK

10:30-12:00 SESSION 1

HIV and AIDS in Asia-Pacific, An Overview of the Situation

Chair: Ms. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary-General,
AFPPD

Presenter: Mr. Swarup Sarkar, Regional Programme Adviser,
UNAIDS

AIMS:

To update parliamentarians on the current status of the epidemic and its trends, and

To discuss country responses from certain countries; provide a briefing on the outcomes of UNGASS; and the issue implementation status of the High Level Meeting (June 2006)

12:00-14:00 LUNCH

14:00-15:30 SESSION 2

Why the HIV/AIDS Epidemic is not Under Control

Chair: Mr. Ian Hunter, MP (Australia)

Panelists: Mr. Sombat Thanprasertsuk, Director, Bureau of AIDS,
TB and STIs, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand

Mr. Praphan Phanuphak, Director, Thai Red Cross AIDS Research
Center

Ms. Jeanine Bardon, Senior Director, Asia/Pacific Regional Office,
FHI

Mr. Jon Ungpakorn, Board Secretary, AIDS Access Foundation

AIMS:

To discuss with Parliamentarians 4 key issues in addressing the
HIV/AIDS Epidemic

Prevention: What is needed to scale up services?

Treatment: How to improve access for all

Discrimination and stigmatization: How to reduce in society

What is pivotal: Policy or implementation?

15:30-15:45 COFFEE BREAK

15:45-17:00 SESSION 3

HIV/AIDS, and Sexual and Reproductive Health - the Critical Linkage

Chair: Mr. Phonethep Pholsena, MP (Lao PDR)

Presenter: Mr. Chaiyos Kunanusont, HIV/AIDS/STI Adviser, UNFPA,
CST Bangkok

AIMS:

Demonstrating to Parliamentarians the importance of Linking HIV/
AIDS with Sexual and Reproductive Health

18:30 DINNER AT SUKOTHAI RESTUARANT

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY 25TH JANUARY 2007

9:00-10:30 SESSION 4

Advocacy for Accountability and Transparency -
from Central to Local Level

Chair: Mr. Peter Barter, Minister for Health (Papua New Guinea)

Panelists:

Ms. Elizabeth Dax, AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific

Ms. Rebecca Reynolds, AIDS Access Foundation

AIMS:

To ensure that Parliamentarians have an understanding about advocacy, What it is and How parliamentarians can use it as a tool to create accountability and transparency at all levels of society.

10:30-11:00 COFFEE BREAK

11:00-12:00 SESSION 5

Funding, Accountability and Transparency

Chair: Mrs. Riffat Javaid, MP (Pakistan)

Presenter: Ms. Rosalia Sciortino, Mahidol University

AIMS:

What are the donors' interests: A perspective about the role of accountability and transparency.

12:00-14:00 LUNCH

14:00-15:15 SESSION 6

Accountability and Transparency: What is Their Relationship in Controlling HIV/AIDS

Chair: Ms. Francesca Semoso, MP (Papua New Guinea)

Presenter: Mr. Gopakumar Nair, Save the Children UK

AIMS:

To provide Parliamentarians with definitions, examples and suggestions that look at both capacity development and the results from the allocation of HIV/AIDS funding.

15:15-15:30 COFFEE BREAK

15:30-16:30 SESSION 7

What Can Parliamentarians Do?

Chair: Mr. Beksultan Tutkushev, MP (Kazakhstan)

Panelists:

Mr. Hakim Sorimuda Pohan (Indonesia)

Mr. Li Honggui (China)

Mr. Le Du, MP (Vietnam)

Ms. Nerissa Corazon Soon-Ruiz (Philippines)

AIMS:

For Parliamentarians to provide their own view about accountability and transparency in HIV/AIDS programmes and to commit to the meeting, 2-3 personal actions to follow up, and to identify the expected impact of these actions.

16:30-17:00 CLOSING SESSION

OPENING CEREMONY

*TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS
OF ALL RANKINGS ARE ESSENTIAL IN RUNNING PROGRAMS AND
OPERATIONS IN REGARDS TO HIV/AIDS*

Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit Secretary-General of AFPPD

Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary-General of AFPPD, emphasized in her opening remarks the significance and power of parliamentarians in tackling problems caused by HIV/AIDS. “To be successful in ending stigmas, creating awareness, and most importantly, approaching the right prevention and treatment, relies upon the political will and commitment of policy makers.” She asserted that corruption, ineffectiveness, and the carelessness of some government officials is blocking the way to making real differences, and thus, parliamentarians should play a dual role in their countries. Firstly in monitoring the implementation of policies, and secondly, influencing the behavior of people to create a coherent , transparent and accountable society.

Hon. Potjaneer Thanavarani, Second Vice President of the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand, as a guest at the opening ceremony, emphasized the need for the cooperation of all nations in the Asian region in solving HIV/AIDS issues. “Parliamentarians are representatives of people in each country and their involvement in these problems, will ensure that we will find an effective way of implementing policy.” She stated her belief that the workshop was a great opportunity for the exchange of experiences of parliamentarians, governments and NGOs. Hon. Potjaneer Thanavarani spoke of Thailand’s success in providing anti-retroviral treatment to at least 50% of people needing it, in comparison to 16% provided throughout Asia. Her speech also referred to the Bangkok Statement of Commitment adopted during the IPCI/ICPD in Thailand in November 2006, where there was commitment to attain at least 10% of national development budgets and development assistance funds for population and reproductive health programmes, including HIV/AIDS prevention.

Dr. Chaiyos Kunanusont, in his remarks, emphasized the importance of discussing transparency and accountability issues in relation to HIV/AIDS, saying that funding of this epidemic has increased immensely from both public and private sectors. “More importantly, international support through several mechanisms such as the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB, Malaria and the PEPFAR, allow countries to expand their interventions to make real changes in HIV prevention and AIDS care. However, these resources will not be available forever. Showing that countries are using resources in the most effective way justifies sustaining and perhaps expansion of these supports,” he added. Coming from UNFPA, Dr. Chaiyos links to the organization as an example of success in being accountable to nations worldwide. The number of donor countries to UNFPA has more than doubled within the past five years. “Five years ago, less than 90 countries made pledges and contributed to UNFPA core budget. After long discussions between the fund and some donor countries, UNFPA has demonstrated that the fund has worked in line with a development model that significantly promotes human rights.



SESSION 1

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HIV/AIDS SITUATION IN ASIA PACIFIC: ARE WE DOING ENOUGH FOR HIV IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC?

Chair Person: Dr. Malinee Sukavejworakit, Secretary-General of AFPPD

“CHANGE IS IN YOUR HANDS AS A REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE WHO LISTEN TO PEOPLE’S VOICE ON HOW TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES.”

Dr Swarup Sarkar, UNAIDS.

The first session of the workshop, “ HIV/AIDS in the Asia Pacific: An Overview of the Situation,” was conducted by Dr. Swarup Sarkar, and gave an overview of the epidemic and the gaps in responses by focusing on the progression of the epidemic; factors driving the epidemic and universal access to care and treatment. “In spite of extraordinary funding increases in HIV, that you do not see in other programmes, HIV infections are still increasing, particularly in Asia. Unless we act urgently, the cost of intervention on HIV will be higher and higher,” said Dr. Sarkar. He talked of the spread of the epidemic in Asia, showing that by 2006, 8.3 million Asians are HIV positive, with one million new infections and half a million deaths each year. Speaking of the factors which propels the spread of the epidemic, Dr. Sarkar made an interesting point that what actually drives the spread is not poverty nor underdevelopment, and that HIV/AIDS still spreads rapidly even in developed states. He said that the spread of HIV/AIDS in Asia can be traced from IDUs (Injecting Drug Users), transmitting HIV to the general population including MSM and sex workers. He emphasized that the pattern of the epidemic in Asia is a predictable trend, and has spread because states have neglected IDUs and other vulnerable populations.

He suggested that governments should also consider providing methadone and needle syringes to IDUs to slow down the spread of the

disease. In regards to Universal Access, Mr. Sakar gave an example of the difference in the prevalence of the epidemic in Asia and Africa. As Asia appears to be lower in prevalence of HIV/AIDS, Asian nations do not take the issue too seriously. However, if the actual number of infected people is to be evaluated, it can be considered high. Towards the end of his presentation, he introduced the “Three Ones” for successful results in battling the HIV/AIDS epidemic: (1) One national AIDS coordinating authority, (2) One national AIDS action framework; (3) One monitoring evaluation system. During the discussion, parliamentarians shared stories of their own countries. Mrs. Riffat Javaid Kahlon, MP, Pakistan, initiated discussion on HIV/AIDS prevention with religious barriers and gender sensitivities. The dialogue has shown that many of the parliamentarians, mostly of Islamic backgrounds, share the same difficulties. Suggestions were made by Cambodia that religious leaders should be invited to work together with parliamentarians. More importantly, as for the role of parliamentarians, Ms. Francesca Riannah Semoso, MP, Papua New Guinea put forward that there should be an initiator who can stand up and be upfront about the issue.



THREE ONES
FOR BATTLING THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC.

1
ONE NATIONAL AIDS COORDINATING AUTHORITY

2
ONE NATIONAL AIDS ACTION FRAMEWORK

3
ONE MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM

SESSION 2

WHY EPIDEMICS OF HIV/AIDS ARE NOT UNDER CONTROL?

Chairperson: Mr. Ian Hunter, MP, Australia

Dr. Sombat Thanprasertsuk M.D., M.P.H., Director Bureau of AIDS, TB and STIs, Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand, put prevention as the focal point of his presentation. He told parliament that he believes it is the most critical part of any programme, to find the most effective system to tackle the epidemic. The main subjects he discussed were: the past and current trend of HIV epidemic in Thailand; signs of re-emerging HIV transmission; strategic targets and interventions; and possible challenges. He emphasized his concerns on

“WE NEED MORE COMMITMENT FROM ALL LEVELS FROM THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT.”

Dr. Sombat Thanprasertsuk M.D

youth and HIV/AIDS, indicating that, though the trend of new HIV infections in recent years appear to be declining, “more number of youths engage in sex with less use of condoms.” He said that as Thailand has proven to be successful in tackling the epidemic, people tend to take it for granted that the situation is under control. Therefore, prevention becomes less effective. As a result, he suggested the commitment of all sectors in scaling up the resources and capacity of people is imperative.

With the focus on treatment, Dr. Praphan Phanuphak, stated that HIV-related morbidity and mortality can now be prevented as “ARV is a life-saving measure that is sustainable and has proved cost-effective.” He looked at the international policy as well as Thai government policy on HIV/AIDS treatment; problems which may emerge during treatment; and how treatment can be improved, with a focus on the role of parliamentarians’. He emphasized that governments should have a role in promoting the

“IT IS CRUCIAL TO SEEK INFORMATION THAT DOCUMENTS THE STATE OF THE EPIDEMIC AMONG HIDDEN POPULATIONS – SINCE HIV CAN REACH HIGH LEVELS AND YET BE UNNOTICED UNLESS SPECIFIC EFFORTS AT SURVEILLANCE ARE MADE,”

Dr Jeanine Bardon, FHI

Dr. Jeanine Bardon addressed the interrelation of stigma and discrimination as barriers to tackling HIV/AIDS successfully. Talking about sex workers, MSM, IDUs, migrant and mobile populations, Dr. Bardon stressed, “addressing stigma and discrimination is particularly important to these populations in Asia since they are mostly subjected to it on a broad social level and also under the law in many countries.” As she spoke of the negative impacts of stigma, at both the individual level and in health settings, she pointed out that infected persons tend to avoid disclosing their status, even to their sexual partners, and avoid going for treatment and check-ups as they face discrimination even in the hospitals and clinics. “It is crucial to seek information that documents the state of the epidemic among hidden populations – since HIV can reach high levels and yet be unnoticed unless specific efforts at surveillance are made,” she adds. She also gave suggestions on what the government and politicians should do to help prevent problems which may emerge from stigmas. She proposed that the states should enforce laws (e.g., anti-discrimination and HIV laws) which enable access to services and protect people from human rights abuses, involve MARP (Most at Risk Populations) and PLHA (People Living with HIV and AIDS) in planning and implementing services, integrate stigma-reduction activities into all HIV efforts, and work with media to correctly portray HIV and PLHA.

Mr. Jon Ungpakorn, Board Secretary, AIDS Access Foundation, and former senator of Thailand is a well-known advocate of HIV/AIDS prevention. He spoke boldly of the obstacles, especially of the government and politicians who prevent effective HIV/AIDS prevention interventions. The main obstacles he addressed were: the lack of political will of leaders; stigma and discrimination; the imbalanced translation and implementation of policies; and the obsolete cultural and religious traditional practices. He suggested that the government should get civil society (NGOs, religious organizations, business community, rural village and urban poor communities, marginalized and stigmatized groups, IDUs, brothels and PHLAs) involved in policy making and implementation.

SESSION 3

HIV/AIDS AND SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH: THE CRITICAL LINKAGES

Chairperson: Mr. Phonethep Pholsena, MP, Lao PDR Health

Dr. *“SUPPOSE THE EPIDEMIC LASTS FOR 12 HOURS, 6AM TO 6AM, WHAT TIME IS THE HIV EPIDEMIC IN YOUR COUNTRY?”*
Dr Chaiyos

Chaiyos gave an innovative presentation which was both and entertaining and informative. He started off with a question to parliamentarians, “suppose the epidemic lasts for 12 hours, 6am to 6pm, what time is it in your country?” His aim was to make parliamentarians contemplate if the time they proposed can be verified, by the use of concrete evidence from their country. He encouraged parliamentarians to go away and find out the actual situation within their countries. He introduced four overlapping areas which link SRH (Sexual Reproductive Health) with HIV: VCCT, BCC, STIs and PMTCT.

With this, he reminded parliamentarians that it may be easy for the government to draft an HIV/AIDS policy, just as himself being able to identify the linkages, but it is difficult to implement when using lessons from an existing system on a larger scale. In the upscaling of services, he emphasized the importance of integrating services to match the needs of people at risk as well as infected persons. Dr. Chaiyos examined the model of ‘pilot projects’ which are effective, but are only so on a small scale. “We do pilot projects to identify effective interventions, but it is very difficult to apply on a large scale. This is why we cannot control the epidemic,” he said. As a result, he left the question of “scaling up” to apply to the existing good practices at the national level for parliamentarians to concentrate on. “Promise me that you will go back and identify more preventions and implement them in your country,” he said to parliamentarians at the end of his presentation.

CHECKLIST FOR ADDRESSING THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC

DO YOU HAVE THIS IN YOUR COUNTRY?

VCCT

VOLUNTARY CONFIDENTIAL COUNSELLING & TESTING

BCC

BEHAVIOUR CHANGE COMMUNICATION

STI

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS

PMTCT

PREVENTION OF MOTHER TO CHILD TRANSMISSION



SESSION 4

ADVOCACY FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY: FROM CENTRAL TO LOCAL LEVEL

Chairperson: Sir Peter Barter, Minister for Health and Bougainville Affairs, Papua New Guinea

“THESE RELATIONSHIPS AND THE NETWORKS THAT THEY CREATE ARE ESSENTIAL BUILDING BLOCKS ON OUR ONGOING BATTLE AGAINST HIV/AIDS. WITHOUT THEM, WE HAVE LITTLE CHANCE OF WINNING ANY GROUND AGAINST NEW INFECTIONS, AGAINST MISINFORMATION, AGAINST STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATIONS,”

Rebecca Reynolds

Ms. Rebecca Reynolds of AIDS Access Foundation, Thailand, focused her presentation on the importance of the relationship between parliamentarians and NGOs in regards to transparency and accountability on HIV/AIDS problem. As parliamentarians and NGOs are in the middle between people and the government, they should work together so that understanding between the state and civil society is created, both socially and culturally. Currently, the problems of transparency and accountability have emerged as NGO and politicians mistrust each other. Therefore, there needs to be a separate agenda for parliamentarians and NGOs. “These relationships and the networks that they create are essential building blocks on our ongoing battle against HIV/AIDS. Without them, we have little chance of winning any ground against new infections, against misinformation, against stigma and discriminations,” she concluded. In addition, she had also made suggestions as to how parliamentarians can play a proactive role, some of which include: making the introductions between your local and national PLWHA groups as well as NGOs and the relevant government departments; involve HIV positive people on any related committees or action groups that make decisions about HIV/AIDS programs; and recommend parliamentarians to try taking HIV/AIDS test themselves.

Dr. Elizabeth Dax spoke mainly of the relevance of HIV/AIDS to government and governance, giving explanations why parliamentarians and policy makers should pay attention to HIV/AIDS advocacy and advocates. She defined advocacy and the roles of advocates as well as the role of policy makers and good governance. She emphasized the notion of successful advocacy, being that results should meet the needs of the people; the processes of advocating should be transparent, or open to public scrutiny; and how resources used in the processes should be accountable, or known to all relevant parties. Dr. Dax showed the link of how the government, at the national level, is closely linked to the advocacy at the local level, stating that interactive responses from all parties are the most effective responses to HIV/AIDS. “The science demonstrates that when it comes to HIV, your neighbor’s problems are your problems,” she said. With this, she described to parliamentarians the advocacy cycle, where check and balance and identifying the gaps of unsuccessful advocacy are essential. She also gave an example of one of the most erroneous cases of ineffective advocacy in Asia, the high error rates of HIV blood testing. She pointed out that statistics are unreliable misdiagnoses occur concurrently, identifying the cause of this as the poor advocacy of proper clinical environment.



“THE SCIENCE DEMONSTRATES THAT WHEN IT COMES TO HIV, YOUR NEIGHBOR’S PROBLEMS ARE YOUR PROBLEMS,”

Dr Elizabeth Dax

SESSION 5

FUNDING, ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Chairperson: Mrs. Riffat Javaid Kahlon, MP, Pakistan

Dr. Rosalia Sciortino of Mahidol University, Thailand, focused her presentation on AIDS Funding Efficiency. As Dr. Sciortino gave an overview of AIDS funding globally, she pointed out the inefficiencies of funding, particularly for those in possession of large sums of money. She expressed concerns that the rapidly expanding budgets are making it more possible to have a weak oversight mechanism, abuse of fund usage, and diversion of funding. As a result, what is necessary is a 'capable accountable and transparent state and institution.' She emphasized the role of states in implementing sound policies; ensuring effective and timely execution of activities; making transparent allocation of funds; and controlling waste and improper use or diversion of resources. As for parliamentarians, she suggested that the governance reform should be put into practice. This mainly include: increasing government commitment to good governance; improving public financial management and oversight of public expenditure; ensuring government effectiveness and better civil service performance at the various administrative levels; establishing independent oversight institutions; encouraging voice and participation of relevant stakeholders and affected constituencies; and enhancing effectiveness and predictability of the rule of law and its enforcement.

During the discussion, the chair of the session, Mrs. Riffat Javaid Kahlon, in response to Dr. Sciortino's speech raised up the controversial issue of whether funding should go into prevention or treatment, setting the ground of this session's discussion.

Dr. Ammar Siamwalla, member of the Thai National Legislative Assembly, expressed his concerns to the stigma against those who are already infected. In regards to fund spending, he said the cost of treatment as well as prevention should be taken into consideration. Although prevention cost, in his view, may be higher, it still should not be neglected. Dr. Sciortino responded that prevention is not as cheap as we think if it is to be done properly.

However, the situation in many countries now is that they believe it is inexpensive and as a result, conduct only short-term prevention schemes. Thus, reach all levels of society, it has to be continuous. She also pointed out that those who are HIV positive will also need prevention, and hence,

“THE DANGER OF THE MISUSE OF FUNDS IS LARGER OFTEN WHEN THE AMOUNTS ARE LARGE AND TRANSPARENCY IS NOT THERE”

Dr. Rosalia Sciortino

both funding of prevention and treatment should go hand in hand.

Another subject of discussion was by Mr. Beksultan Tutkushev, Senator of Kazakhstan. He spoke of the funding situation in Kazakhstan where most HIV positive people are IDUs.



SESSION 6

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY: WHAT IS THEIR RELATIONSHIP IN CONTROLLING HIV/AIDS

Chairperson: Ms. Francesca Riannah Semoso, MP, Papua New Guinea

Mr Nair, HIV and AIDS Policy and Programme Adviser, Save the Children, UK, addressed the problems of HIV/AIDS at both the national and international level. With respect to accountability, he said that there needs to be a link between the donors and the communities as well as quality and performance. Statistics presented showed that during government processes of programme development, less than 50% of

“WHAT WE NEED IS A COMPETENT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND RATING SYSTEM FOR DONORS”

Mr. Gopakumar Nair

PLWA (People Living With Aids) and only one third of civil society were consulted. Other obstructions leading to ineffective implementation he referred to were: transparency issues, in which governments are not accountable to the actions of the politicians in handling funds; and a lack of quality reporting on HIV/AIDS which leads the government to incorrectly identify the source of problems. Another interesting point he raised is ‘Global Strategy versus Grassroots Reality.’ By this, he implied that the grants and funds given by donor organizations sometimes do not meet the needs of the locals who the grants are intended for.

He suggested that parliamentarians should establish competent performance management and rating systems for donors. As for transparency, he suggested the notion of naming and shaming in which corrupted politicians should be exposed to set examples.

Mr. Nair’s presentation set the ground for a fruitful discussion amongst parliamentarians. “It (HIV/AIDS) started with us and ends with us,

“It (HIV/AIDS) STARTED WITH US AND ENDS WITH US, WITH OR WITHOUT MONEY. MONEY MIGHT BE A SETBACK, BUT WITHOUT MONEY, WE STILL HAVE TO CARRY ON,”

Ms. Francesca Riannah Semoso, MP, PNG



SESSION 7

WHAT CAN PARLIAMENTARIANS DO?

Chairperson: Mr. Beksultan Tutkushev, Senator of Kazakhstan

During this session, parliamentarians from the Philippines, Indonesia, China and Vietnam gave presentations on their country's current HIV/AIDS situations and proactive actions undertaken by their governments, giving examples for their counterparts.

CHINA

Mr. Li Honggui, MP, China presented the situation of China and said that the spread of the disease is speeding up, especially in the rural areas. China has now accepted that the situation is not only a public health issue but is also social, ethical and national security issue. China has, thus, established a consulting organization, with the full involvement of NGOs and International and regional cooperation. Chinese parliamentarians are also taking a proactive role in influencing policies and action on HIV/AIDS, such as supporting and promoting governments and NGOs as well as other sectors to take on actions in the area of prevention and treatment. China has also promised to continue to take an active role in tackling the issues and continue to have close relationships with the international society on issues regarding HIV/AIDS.

PHILLIPINES

Talking of the situation in the Philippines, Ms. Nerissa Corazon Soon-Ruiz said "HIV incidence has been described as hidden and growing, a marked change from low and slow a few years ago. The number of people living with HIV in the Philippines is still very low, but it has more than doubled compared to 2001, according to a United Nations report on the global AIDS epidemic." She added that the total spending on HIV and AIDS has been decreasing while the number of HIV and AIDS cases are increasing. However, though the share of spending for treatment is low, it has been increasing since 2002. "These services are limited to laboratory tests, prophylaxis for opportunistic infections (OIs), and treatment of OIs. While the cost of antiretroviral therapy (ART) is usually borne by the AIDS patient, efforts are being made to make it more accessible and affordable," she asserted. She had also made a proposal of what should be done to enhance the efficiency of HIV/AIDS policies. Some of these include: increasing appropriations for HIV/AIDS programmes and enhancing the existing HIV and AIDS information and educational program.

VIETNAM

Mr. Le Du, has talked of the current HIV/AIDS situation in Vietnam, in that the government had just recently taken an active role in passing a law on AIDS in legalizing Harm Reduction in June 2006. He also pointed out the challenges Vietnam is encountering: stigma and discrimination on HIV infection; low cover of prevention, harm reduction; difficulties in coordinating and using international funding on HIV/AIDS effectively; and the high cost of ARV. He also presented to the meeting actions Vietnamese representatives will take after this workshop, such as: reporting to the Speaker, Prime Minister on Bangkok meeting, and recommendation for policy change, budget for AIDS; conduct seminars among VAPPD to report Bangkok meeting, emphasizing on transparency on AIDS program; and evaluating the implementation of AIDS Law. To conclude, he gave recommendations to the workshop, asserting that: AFPPD and UNFPA should also support national meetings on Accountability, Transparency and AIDS programmes; Asian parliamentarians should hold a meeting on harm reduction policies on AIDS programme; and as for the next meeting, PLWA should also be invited to attend the seminar. During the discussion, representatives of other nations, including Laos, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan have also presented their country's report to the workshop.

INDONESIA

Speaking of the current HIV/AIDS situation in Indonesia, Dr. Hakim reported that there is currently 8,194 AIDS cases, 5,230 in December, with the estimated number of HIV vulnerable population in 2006 at 193,000. He had also talked of affirmative actions the Indonesian parliament has taken through Indonesian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development (IFPPD) in Fighting HIV/AIDS. These include empowering of three parliament functions of legislation action, identifying proper budget allocation, and monitoring and control; Facilitating in developing legislation; urging for proper budgeting to fight HIV/AIDS; and developing indicators for effective monitoring. He discussed the successful advocacy in Indonesia in which 1.80% of HIV/AIDS highrisk group can access prevention services and medication; 2.50% of HIV/AIDS high-risk group can be part of 100-Condom use program; and 3.60% of HIV/AIDS high-risk group can change their behavior.

CLOSING SESSION

Mr. Beksultan Tutkushev, Senator of Kazakhstan and Deputy Security General of AFPPD, chaired the closing session. He expressed hopes that this will not be the last workshop on HIV/AIDS, and urged parliamentarians to put into action the proposals and ideas from the event. Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director, proposed votes of thanks to all.

The event was closed by Dr. Chaiyos Kuananusont, HIV/AIDS/STI Advisor, UNFPA, CST, Bangkok. “Until now, I believe everybody agrees with me that we have had a very useful workshop. First of all, it lasts only two days, and workshop agenda is in good sequence. We have learned the situation and trend, we went into discussing why the epidemic has not been under controlled, linking HIV/AIDS with SRH, go in details on advocacy, accountability and transparency from several angles of view. It really has been a very productive workshop because all delegates have participated actively in discussions. Compare this to a book, I see this closing ceremony as the end of one chapter and obviously we are getting into the next chapter. What remains? There are many things we can do. We know that small pilot projects with limited coverage never make impacts. We know that some people are still complacent. We know that winning a battle as in Thailand does not mean winning the whole war with the HIV/AIDS epidemics. We have learned many things together and I think in the next chapter in your countries you can be very initiative. We can obviously share knowledge and experiences of attending this workshop with our colleagues. That is the first and most simple task to do. I believe we will have more allies when we ensure awareness of our colleagues that HIV and AIDS is still around. It never leaves us. In some situation, it went underground or stays with sub populations that we do not pay enough attention to such issues as men having sex with men or injecting drug users. The most critical sub-population is young people. They are our future. We are their present. It is our responsibility to make present bright and shine so the future will be bright and shine.”

ANNEX 1

COMMITMENTS MADE BY ATTENDING PARLIAMENTARIANS'

AUSTRALIA

Mr. Ian Hunter, MP

1. Report to APGPD on the issues raised at this conference; in particular, raise concerns about the epidemic at PNG and how Australia is dealing with accountability and transparency in regards to its donor programs.
2. Attempt to organise a meeting between Dr. Elizabeth Dax and the South Australian Health Minister to talk about HIV/AIDS programs in the region.
3. Meet with the South Australian AIDS Council, and raise issues of accountability and transparency.

CAMBODIA

Mr. Prakath Pen, Deputy Director, International Relations Department

1. Try to get more involvement from all level of society; in particular NGOs and private sector, as well as HIV/positive people, in the fight against the epidemic.
2. Expand activities for the dissemination of the AIDS law that was adopted; in order to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS, and reduce discrimination and stigma.

CHINA

Ms. Lijuan Pang, MP

1. To promote the implementation of the HIV/AIDS law and regulations in China. Put forward to the full function of the government and related government departments.
2. To enhance the investment on the programs of information sharing and learning, prevention and treatment, and studies on HIV/AIDS control.

INDONESIA

Mr. Hakim Sorimuda Pohan, MP

1. Find the information on how much budget has been allocated for HIV/AIDS.
2. Ask the Budget Committee in the parliament to pay attention to the budget in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

Ms. Tuti Indarsih Loekman Soetrisno, MP

1. I will disseminate valuable information from the workshop to all members of IFPPD and other regional parliamentarians, especially the importance of accountability and transparency in all government and non-government HIV/AIDS program.
2. I will start making a list of all HIV/AIDS programs that my government initiated and a list of non-government organizations active in HIV/AIDS, and ask for their transparent reports of the activities and funds that they are using.

IRAN

Mr. Mohammad Gholi Haji Eyri, MP

1. I will try to promote a law for HIV/AIDS accountability and transparency in the parliament.
2. I will try to help and guide people about intravenous drug users and HIV, as it is the most at risk group in Iran

LAO PDR

Mr. Phonethep Pholsena, MP

1. Promote the new law that protects people from HIV/AIDS/STI and promote SRH programs.
2. Motivate the participation of the community against HIV/AIDS/STI, through mass media, and monitor closely the implementation of HIV/AIDS/SRH programs by the government.

Ms. Bounyeune Thitphouthavong, MP

1. Encourage the concerned organizations to pay attention on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. Promote a new law and improve prevention campaigns in HIV/AIDS/ STI and RH.
2. Motivate the community to participate against HIV/AIDS/STI, through mass-media, and monitor closely the implementation of HIV/AIDS program.

Mr. Herseng Yearpaoher, Deputy Director, Social Cultural Department

1. Encourage the concerned organizations to strengthen the relationship between the national and provincial level on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.
2. Strengthen mass media on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, and inform the government how HIV/AIDS can be under control through accountability and transparency.

MONGOLIA

Ms. Gandhi Tugsjargal, MP

1. As Chairman of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, Education, Culture and Science; I will deliver the speech on HIV/AIDS with focus on accountability and transparency at the parliamentary session and submit a report about the Asian Parliamentarians' Workshop to the Speaker of the Parliament.
2. We would like to organize a national workshop on HIV/AIDS among the parliamentarians in Mongolia during the mid of February, 2007, as asked by Mr. Shiv Khare, Executive Director of AFPPD.
3. I think that Mongolia has no experience of accountability and transparency on HIV/AIDS because Mongolia is a low HIV prevalence country. We could develop a new policy and amend the law on prevention of HIV/AIDS to improve the monitoring system on HIV/AIDS and determine indicators.

PAKISTAN

Ms. Onaza Ehsan, MP

1. Would definitely talk about this grave global disease to my fellow parliamentarians, as well as to other people, regarding the prevention of this disease and its serious implications to highlight this issue.
2. Would promote every action towards its eradication, in support to NGOs and people working for this cause.

Ms. Riffat Javaid, MP

1. I would register my concern regarding HIV/AIDS, first of all to the Federal/Provincial Minister of Health. Secondly, I would like to discuss this issue with the Chairperson for Standing Committee for Health. I will talk to all my friends and colleagues in the opposition to put up questions in the parliament.
2. I, as a parliamentarian, would call my lady councilors/basic health workers working in the Basic Health Unit – situated in every 5 villages of my constituency, to be aware of this very grave disease and request them to talk to the general public.

“Talking and informing people is empowering people”.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Sir Peter Barter, MP

1. Introduce standard reports that will be acceptable to the donors and government.
2. Increase VCT centers and tests.

Ms. Francesca Semoso, MP

1. More advocacies on getting rid of the stigma against HIV positive people.
2. Upgrade testing sites.
3. Work with the HIV committee on my island and start a transparent fundraising committee; and involve civil society, business houses, youth, women and HIV positive people.

PHILIPPINES

Ms. Nerissa Corazon Soon Ruiz, MP

1. Demand from the National AIDS Council the progress reports and initiatives they have undertaken and the results of such programs so that Congress could allocate necessary budgetary support for all these programs. Also, the National AIDS Council should report out how much funds they have received from international funding sources and how these are spent.
2. Budget allocation for prevention and treatment should be equitable, thus data collected must be reliable. There should be a standard collection of data.

THAILAND

Mr. Prat Boonyawongvirot, MP

1. Periodically monitor and evaluate the HIV/AIDS situation.
2. Advocate and collaborate with other organizations (GOs and NGOs) on HIV/AIDS issues.

VIETNAM

Mr. Le Du, MP

1. Raise issues on accountability and transparency on AIDS program in the parliament session.
2. Contact voters to discuss AIDS prevention.

Ms. Pham Thi Hoa, MP

1. Discuss with some MPs about the main content of the seminar, especially on accountability and transparency of AIDS program.
2. Contact voters to talk about AIDS prevention. Receive and support AIDS program for PLWA

Ms. Nguyen Thi Thuong, MP

1. Contact voters to educate about AIDS prevention. Find out the “hot spots” of HIV infection in my constituency.
2. Present information from this seminar in Bangkok on AIDS to the local government.

ANNEX 2

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