

Colleagues and friends,

Good morning.

It is great to be here with you, members of a thriving civil society in Viet Nam who have become more and more active in the national response to AIDS.

Your gathering today reminds me of the strong presence of civil society in the recent United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on AIDS, which took place in New York in June. The Viet Nam delegation, led by Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong and included civil society representatives, participated very meaningfully in the discussion there.

The High-Level Meeting resulted in a global commitment to intensify global efforts to eliminate HIV and AIDS, with the goal of achieving the “3 zeros”: Zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. It is clear that without you - groups of people living with HIV, people at higher risk of HIV infection and the larger civil society –pivotal partners of the national response to HIV, Viet Nam will not be able to achieve this “3 zeros” goal.

During the last 20 years of Viet Nam’s response to HIV, you have always been working at the frontline of HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. You tirelessly reach out to people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men, sex workers, their clients and their spouses and intimate partners, help them understand the risk of HIV infection and know how to protect

themselves and their loved ones from HIV. You distribute millions of clean needles and syringes, and condoms and lubricant, so that the most-at-risk people you have reached can act upon their new knowledge. You refer people at higher risk of HIV infection to voluntary counselling and testing services. You help put people living with HIV on anti-retroviral treatment and help them adhere to treatment. You advocate for the rights of people living with and affected by HIV who are denied by their communities. You overcome challenges in your own lives and courageously come out to tell the public your stories so HIV-related myths and stigma can be reduced.

The last year has seen an expansion in methadone maintenance therapy, needles and syringes and condom provision programmes. The first co-pay methadone clinic was opened in Hai Phong with contributions of other sectors than the Government and give more choices for drug users who want to be on methadone treatment but not eligible yet for the current program. In the area of sex work, a lot of progress has been made in recent years to look at new ways of addressing this issue. The United Nations in Viet Nam strongly recommend moving away from administrative detention and towards community-based harm reduction and using this approach to address drug use and sex work.

Positive government policy changes that embrace harm reduction will create more room for community-based HIV prevention services and therefore more favourable conditions for self-help groups and other civil society organizations to engage in service delivery.

I have seen the much needed capacity of civil society significantly improved in the five years I have been here. It is essential for your meaningful engagement in the national response and successful service delivery. I congratulate you for the successful development of a civil society proposal for the round 9 of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. I believe the implementation of this grant will greatly enhance your capacity and contribute to the national response to HIV.

There are always more you can do to continuously strengthen yourself and contribute even more to the national response to HIV!

I would like to urge you to:

- Make more policy advocacy efforts. You are the ones who turn policies into life

and your feedback from the ground are essential for the adjustment of those policies. Your life experiences are extremely helpful for the development and adjustment of HIV policies. So let your voice be heard and be acted upon.

- Continue coordinating among yourself for inputs and comments to the national HIV strategy. It is on the website of the Viet Nam Administration for AIDS Control for comment now;

- Create more HIV agents of change in your communities and together with them speak out against stigma and discrimination. Stigma and discrimination are still among the biggest barriers to the uptake of HIV services in Viet Nam.

Congratulate VCSPA and SCDI for having brought so many different groups from so many provinces together, with support of USAID/HPI and PEPFAR.

Finally I wish all of you good health and stronger resolution to respond to HIV. I hope you all will become strong advocates for the achievement in Viet Nam of the goal on Zero new HIV infection. Zero discrimination, and Zero AIDS-related death.

Thank you.