

The 10th Anniversary of the National Committee for AIDS, Drugs and Prostitution Prevention and Control (5 June 2000 - 5 June 2010)

H.E Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong, Former Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Khanh, Minister of Health Nguyen Quoc Trieu, Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan

Good morning colleagues and friends.

It is with great pleasure that I stand before you today and congratulate the National Committee on ten years of responding to HIV, drug use and sex work. It is incredible to think how far you have come in just one decade. Last time I addressed you, at your Annual Review Meeting, we talked about how the Year of the Tiger would be an energetic year, one where a great number of accomplishments would be possible. However, when looking over the list of your achievements, I am tempted to think the National Committee's Tiger year has been going on for an entire decade!

You have been responsible for developing the legal tools that are the skeleton of the HIV response. Let me mention some of these tools:

- In 1995, Directive 52 of the Party Secretariat and the Ordinance on AIDS Prevention and Control of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly;
- A year later, Implementing Decree No. 34 on tasks and responsibilities of each ministry and sector;
- In 2004, the multisectoral National Strategy for AIDS Prevention and Control;
- In 2005, Directive 54 of the Party Secretariat on Strengthening leadership in HIV/AIDS prevention and control in the new context;
- In 2006, the Law on HIV Prevention and Control;
- In 2008 you revised the Law on Drug Prevention and Control;
- In 2009 you began revising the Ordinance on Prostitution Prevention and Control;
- You repealed the law that made condoms evidence of sex work, thus allowing sex workers to protect themselves and their clients from HIV and other diseases without fear of arrest while using condoms;
- And soon you will finish drafting the next five-year National Strategy on HIV.

Supported by this strong legal and policy framework you have invested in capacity building for people and systems to give the response muscle, and you have stepped up coordination of central, local and international stakeholders to give the response direction. We in the

international community are particularly grateful that you are now inviting us to National Committee meetings and that you include us in your events and dialogue as partner.

This work that you have undertaken has been both sensitive and complex and we congratulate Viet Nam, and the National Committee in particular, on your achievements thus far.

Since you started your work as a committee in 2000 :

- Work is underway to review Viet Nam's response to sex work and find more ways to ensure sex workers' access to condoms, Voluntary Counseling and Treatment and Anti-Retroviral treatment and other available HIV services. This work will also ensure to protect sex workers' rights and provide them with vocational options.
- Drug dependence is now considered a medical issue, not a crime.
- The HIV epidemic has remained largely concentrated among key populations at higher risk.
- 67,047 people – or 54% of all currently in need – are on antiretroviral therapy.
- In 2009 alone, 24 million clean needles and syringes were distributed by almost 13,000 peer educators and collaborators and as a result, in a few provinces more than 93% of injecting drug users report using clean injecting equipment.
- Nearly 2,000 drug users now have access to Methadone Maintenance Therapy in Hai Phong, Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City.
- And 24.8 million condoms have been distributed to key populations at higher risk.

These are only a few of the achievements of the National Committee, the member ministries and their implementing partners, but already are a testimony to your planning, foresight and management. And of course, to your very hard work!

Throughout your history as a coordinating body, we in the international community have done our best to work in partnership with you to respond to these challenging issues and we will continue to do so. We are here to share in your hardships, invest in your successes and struggle side-by-side with you to stop HIV and to respond appropriately to drug use and sex work.

All the people of Viet Nam must be protected, whether they participate in high risk behaviours or are an innocent school child. As Deputy Prime Minister Trong once said, "I don't want any Vietnamese person, not an injecting drug user, not a newborn baby, I don't want to see any of my Vietnamese people get HIV. We must work hard to protect the life of every Vietnamese person. Life is what is important. Things are not."

Through the National Committee's dedication, I believe that the Deputy Prime Minister's wish will come true. Ho Chi Minh once said that King Hung – whose death anniversary we have recently celebrated – formed the Vietnamese nation and it is now the duty of every person in Viet Nam to protect and defend it. I encourage you to continue your hard work in responding to HIV, especially as Viet Nam is currently not on track to achieve Millennium Development Goal No.6 on halting and reversing the spread of HIV and AIDS by 2015. To do so we must address HIV within the broader development agenda for Viet Nam, including its links to

development challenges such as poverty and gender inequality. Greater alignment between the next Social and Economic Development Plan for 2011-2015 and sectoral plans is essential to meet national goals and commitments in the response to HIV. I would also like to encourage the National Committee to strongly advocate for the inclusion of HIV, drugs and sex work prevention and control in the Party Congress document.

Looking to the future, I would like to encourage you to continue pushing for the following three priorities for the next five years:

1. Improve the existing HIV legal and policy environment at both national and provincial levels to better respond to the needs of people at higher risk of, or living with or affected by HIV ;
2. Mobilize more resources in country and manage resources more effectively, particularly at the local level, to achieve a sustainable national response to HIV in Viet Nam and to achieve Millennium Development Goal No.6;
3. Ensure sustainable access to a comprehensive package of quality HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services for all people at higher risk of HIV and people living with HIV in Viet Nam.

Do not forget that your efforts affect millions of people. I encourage you to ensure that the Vietnamese tradition of “love your neighbour as yourself” blossoms. Do not tolerate stigma and discrimination, and the violation of the rights that Viet Nam’s domestic laws and international commitments protect. Prioritize the needs of those that are most vulnerable. Find ways to better support sex workers and drug users and integrate them back into the community. Increase funding and programme efficiency to make Viet Nam’s HIV response sustainable.

With your compassion, Viet Nam’s future will be bright.

Thirty years ago, a famous Western writer was moved like we, your partners, are today by the compassion that Vietnamese leaders bring to the business of politics. After living with the people for more than a decade and befriending the great Ho Chi Minh, the journalist Wilfred Burchett wrote, ‘Ho Chi Minh revered and was inspired by [the people’s] burning patriotism, their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice for the nation. He had unbounded faith in the masses.’

I find a poignant parallel as I stand before you, a representative of the international community, and say that from our perspective this tradition of inspired leadership is upheld in each member of the National Committee and exemplified in Deputy Prime Minister Trong. Your work in this ‘Tiger Decade’ is inspiring patriotism, courage and a spirit of self-sacrifice for the nation among your many partners and among the Vietnamese people.

In conclusion, after ten years, the National Committee can be proud of having led with conviction and compassion. You didn’t always go the easy way – methadone was controversial, as is harm reduction, service provision in prisons, alternative responses to sex work and strengthening the role of civil society. Yet you have always tried to do the right thing and will continue to change and adapt to respond to the needs of the people that need you the most. I would like to thank you for your work.

In particular, I would like to express my deep admiration and thanks to Deputy Prime Minister Trong for the work that he has done for the people of Viet Nam.

On behalf of the international community, congratulations to the National Committee on your 10th anniversary. We look forward to working with you for another ten years and beyond.

Thank you.