

*Thursday 29 November, 2007 Ha Noi, Viet Nam*

Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong, Minister of Health Nguyen Quoc Trieu, Minister of MOLISA Madam Nan, national and international colleagues and distinguished guests. On behalf of the international community in Viet Nam, I would like to congratulate all the contestants and organisers for their hard work and creativity. We have been pleased to have a role this Innovation Day and we pledge to support expanding the process next year so that even more new and creative community-based responses can be brought forward.

We are particularly pleased that the Innovation Day has coincided with the commemoration of World AIDS Day, as this competition exemplifies the theme of the 2007 Campaign: leadership. Leadership at all levels and from all members of society is crucial because, as the Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki-Moon says in his statement for World AIDS Day this year, “AIDS ... is a social issue, a human rights issue, an economic issue. It does to society what HIV does to the human body -- reduces resilience and weakens capacity, hampers development and threatens stability.”

We simply cannot allow Viet Nam to weaken, not after you have worked so hard to overcome many hardships to become an independent nation, a member of the World Trade Organisation, a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and, very soon, a middle income country. We cannot allow HIV to destroy Viet Nam's brilliant future. We – government leaders, communities, families, students, people living with HIV – need to come together from today onwards to respond to HIV with ever increasing speed, strength and determination. Now is the time for each Vietnamese person to be a hero.

The great leader Ho Chi Minh insisted that a person who is determined and patient can move an entire mountain, or fill an entire ocean, without difficulty. “Remember,” he once said, “the storm is a good opportunity for the pine and the cypress to show their strength and their stability.”

The longer I stay in Viet Nam, the more I admire Vietnamese traditional values. I have learned here the importance of acting from both the head and the heart, together. I believe this is all you need to stop this epidemic – compassion from our hearts to end stigma and discrimination, and an understanding in our heads of the simple prevention measures that will keep our communities safe: access to condoms and clean needles, peer education and substitution therapies such as methadone.

I would like to end my speech tonight by quoting Peter Piot, the Executive Director of UNAIDS, who insisted in his recent World AIDS Day statement that, “Sustaining leadership and accelerating action on AIDS isn't something just for politicians. It involves religious leaders, community, youth and council leaders, chief executives [of companies] and trade union leaders. It involves people living with HIV, and their families and friends. It involves you, me – each and every one of us.”

Thank you all for taking the lead; I absolutely believe Viet Nam will win. Viet Nam vo dich!

Thank you, good evening and good health to all.