

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to attend this event. As we are standing here, communes around the country are holding meetings just like this one to commemorate World AIDS Day. Three thousand events are taking place across Viet Nam. Out of all of those, I consider myself very fortunate to be in Nam Dinh.

The slogan for this year's World AIDS Day is Universal Access and human rights. In order to support people living with HIV and prevent new infections, we must respect the rights of all people regardless of their opinions, behaviours, beliefs and HIV status. We must make sure everyone who needs it can access HIV services like counselling and testing, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, condoms, clean needles and syringes and antiretroviral medicines. The biggest barrier to Universal Access and human rights – in other words, the biggest barrier to saving lives – is stigma and discrimination.

I am very confident that the people of Nam Dinh can help stop HIV. Dr Long, Director General of the Viet Nam Administration of AIDS Control, and Chi Phuong Mai, my right hand, are children of this province who are working hard to support you and Viet Nam.

As you know, the most effective way to stop HIV is to prevent it, and Nam Dinh province is exceptional at prevention. It is because of you that 3000 communes across Viet Nam are not holding their meetings right now in Chinese! General Tran Hung Dao, a child of Nam Dinh, prevented the Chinese from colonising Viet Nam in the 13th century. You are the only people in the world to defeat the Mongol armies of Genghis Khan. And you did it not just once, but three times! HIV has no chance against the people of Nam Dinh.

Please accept my best wishes for another successful year responding to HIV.

Thank you and chu suc khoe.