

**Eighth International Conference on AIDS in Asia
and the Pacific (ICAAP)**

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Closing Remarks on 23 August 2007 by

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Honorable Minister Nimal Siripala de Silva, Honorable Ministers from countries in Asia and the Pacific, Representatives of various international organizations, distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

- Firstly I would like to thank the Local Organizing Committee for inviting me to make the closing remarks.
- During the past few days, the participants have been sharing research findings on various aspects of HIV and STI prevention and control.
- This conference is very timely and an excellent opportunity to revisit and reinforce our commitment.
- The commitment to halt and reverse the HIV epidemic in Asia and the Pacific.
- In the Asia Pacific Region, we are at high risk for a massive spread of HIV.
- This is not only due to the large size of the population and the high burden of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- But also, due to the prevailing risk behaviours and vulnerabilities as well as inherent social stigma.
- Government's complacency is still an issue impeding progress in the development of programme for HIV prevention and control.
- We have learnt over many years what works and what does not work in prevention and control of HIV/AIDS.
- Still, there is a gap between what we know from research and the application of that knowledge by national AIDS and STI programmes.
- In addition, there is a need to increase research capacity in this area in countries of this Region.

- We need to facilitate more information exchange, and further strengthen collaboration between researchers and programme managers.
- Research, along with HIV surveillance, monitoring and evaluation, are critical tools to generate evidence for informing policy makers, planners and implementers.
- The evidence from research findings can ensure appropriate design and strengthening of programmes and services.

Distinguished participants,

- Ulcerative STIs increase HIV transmission by 15 to 50 times for women and 50 to 300 times for men.
- Studies have clearly demonstrated how STIs increase the infectiousness of HIV.
- Yet, STI prevention and control, including its surveillance are to receive adequate attention.
- The World Health Organization in South East Asia Region has launched a medium to long term Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Sexually Transmitted Infections between 2007 – 2015.
- The Organization is committed to working more closely with member states in strengthening STI prevention, control and surveillance.

Distinguished participants;

- Since the beginning of its epidemic, HIV prevalence among injecting drug users in many countries has remained around 40 percent.
- However, in some cases, this prevalence has recently increased dramatically.
- Research has suggested that there are workable interventions that may reduce sharing of contaminated needles and syringes;
- Yet, only few countries in Asia have started implementing such interventions.
- Furthermore, the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV is complex.
- Whereas, HIV transmission from mothers to infants have been virtually eliminated in industrialized countries;
- Only limited progress has been made in scaling up services for the same purpose in the low-and-middle-income countries.

- Some research findings have shown that low-cost antiretroviral therapy can effectively reduce mother-to-child transmission.
- Yet, only few countries in Asia have reached the necessary scale of such intervention.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

- It is estimated that 50 percent of all new HIV infections are among young people.
- About 7000 of these people become infected everyday.
- Thirty per cent of the nearly 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS are in the age group of 15 to 24 years.
- Thailand had successfully halted and reversed the HIV epidemic in this group of population in the mid nineties.
- From that lesson, few countries have begun to offer youth-friendly prevention, care and treatment services.
- Recent data show that antiretroviral therapy may decrease the morbidity and mortality of HIV associated TB.
- This treatment may also contribute to HIV prevention.
- Yet, only few national TB and AIDS programmes have embarked on their collaborative actions towards this goal.
- This is particularly the efforts to increase access to HIV testing, counseling and care and treatment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

- Asia is not an exception to the inadequate coverage of preventive services for HIV.
- Despite effective interventions, such as condom use targeting sex workers;
- And harm reduction targeting injecting drug users in several countries;
- The coverage of these preventive interventions across the Region has been far from satisfaction.
- To address these shortcomings, financial resources do not seem to be a bottleneck.
- The Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria is one of many funding sources for country initiatives to scale up HIV prevention and control.

- What is needed is our capability and capacity in programme development and management to ensure the most efficient and effective use of available resources.

Distinguished participants;

- HIV was first reported 25 years ago.
- We know what works to prevent its transmission.
- However, scaling up of interventions in many countries is slow.
- Not to talk about “to reach the unreached” who need the services everywhere.
- This is due mainly to the lack of political commitment, and weak public sector response - particularly at the primary care level.
- Furthermore, social stigma is still an important obstacle, which is yet to be effectively overcome.
- Insufficient trained human resources; as well as poverty and gender inequity are all factors that hamper effective interventions.
- To increase concerted efforts to scale up HIV prevention and control, we must firstly reinforce the commitment of governments;
- Also, commitments of nongovernmental partners, civil society, and people living with HIV have to be intensified and synchronized.
- We need to redouble our attention and efforts on key priority areas, where we can achieve the maximum impact.

Distinguished participants and colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

- I am confident that our deliberations during the course of this meeting have provided the necessary information and updates, as well as new ideas.
- These are for us to move forward more effectively in our collaborative actions to better prevent and control HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.
- I would encourage the distinguished participants to review the relevant issues involved, and establish a strong network, as well as functioning partnerships for effective international collaboration.
- The collaboration that can help re-enforce and redouble HIV/STI prevention and control actions, especially in the developing countries.

Ladies and gentlemen;

- Let me finally conclude by expressing my sincere gratitude to the government of Sri Lanka for hosting this very important event in the beautiful city of Colombo.
- And I thank sponsors and co-sponsors of this important conference.
- Thank you.