

**Speech of Mr. Jesper Morch, UN Resident Coordinator a.i.
UNICEF Representative/Chairperson of the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS in Viet Nam
at the Third National Scientific Conference on HIV/AIDS**

Support of the international community for HIV/AIDS prevention and control in Viet Nam

Ho Chi Minh City, 24-26 November 2005

*Mm. Minister of Health, Chairman of People's committee, Vice Ministers,
Colleagues and Friends.*

Please allow me to extend my thanks to you and your colleagues for organizing the Third National Scientific Conference on HIV/AIDS in Ho Chi Minh City.

- From the UN perspective, we have all been very impressed by the increasing government engagement in HIV issues in Viet Nam – as shown by recent development of the national response to the AIDS epidemic including the revision of the Communist Party of Viet Nam's Directive No 52 on AIDS, the formulation of a new law on AIDS, and many others, but above all, this special event today - the 3rd National Scientific Conference- shows us an increasing attention by political, legal and government authorities to the rapidly increasing HIV epidemic in Viet Nam.
- This conference is also a lot about leadership. Participants are here today from many different parts of the Government along with local leaders, policy makers and other sectors of the society. This is a great signal for the effective response in Viet Nam.
- And, the 2005 Global AIDS Epidemic Update has been launched here in Ho Chi Minh City. It shows that the global number of people living with HIV continues to increase. However, in some countries with an effective national response the HIV infection rates are decreasing. This shows us that it is possible to reduce the spread of the epidemic, even in resource limited countries.
- During this conference, we will have discussions on a wide range of issues regarding HIV in Viet Nam, from basic science, prevention, treatment to policy and advocacy. These are all important parts of an effective response, or in other words, an effective response requires the participation of every part of society.
- The three days that we will have together are an opportunity for us to review the achievements of the national response, and at the same time the challenges.
- A key challenge is the issue of stigma and discrimination against people living with and affected by HIV. Responses to this challenge include establishing a legal framework to protect the rights of people living with and affected by HIV, and ensuring appropriate legal remedies. The personal engagement of leaders at all levels in fighting stigma and discrimination is crucial in addressing stigma and discrimination.

- During almost two decades of involvement with the global struggle against AIDS, I've always been partly intrigued and partly dismayed by the double standards we often apply in the international development community. If we have a meeting on health, we will always make sure it is attended by health professionals. But if we have a meeting on HIV/AIDS, chances are we will be talking about PLWHA, rather than have PLWHA talking to us and telling us what their needs are.
- Viet Nam is receiving a lot of attention and support from the international community for the fight against the AIDS epidemic. Some of the major projects include the Global Fund, the DFID/NORAD, the World Bank, the US government and many other multilaterals and bilaterals. The cooperation includes both financial and technical assistance.
- But the challenge for Viet Nam, as for so many other countries, is how to make the money work! The fundamental tool for this is the implementation of the "Three Ones Principles". It sounds so incredibly self-evident, doesn't it? When I heard it, the first time, I thought it was a platitude! One national authority on HIV/AIDS, one national framework on HIV/AIDS and one monitoring and evaluation system. I've come to learn that nothing is more difficult to implement these principles. I've also come to learn that nothing is more important than these. Indeed, it is the key to success. So if indeed we can "underline the leading role" of the implications of these principles. And mind you in practical action rather than rhetorical abstraction, nothing could be more important.
- And we are looking forward to everybody present today to be voices of advocacy – tough, unrelenting, informed. The issues are so intense, the situation so precarious – ever increasing numbers of people, the virus cuts such a swath of pain and desolation that your voices, our voices must be summoned and heard. Our task is Herculean. But in this battle, no one is exempt; no government, no sector, no agency, no NGO, no part of civil society, no multilateral organization, no individual, no expert, no scientist, no public health professional. We can subdue this pandemic, but it will take the collective and uncompromising voices of principle and outrage to make it happen. Ladies and gentlemen, in other words, it will take your voices
- Reaching children and families infected and affected by AIDS highlights the need for a society wide response to HIV. While government sets policy and establish services, we need leaders to make a personal commitment to ensuring the needs of children are a priority; that local NGOs and others connect directly with families to provide care and support, and we need a legal system that ensures that the rights of children to education, health services including ART, and a life without stigma and discrimination are ensured.
- The reality is that AIDS is here to stay. Therefore, our response has to be sustainable, and sustained. AIDS is both a development issue and an epidemic – and our response has to reflect both issues.
- Speaking on behalf of the UN system here in Viet Nam, we know that there is a wealth of experience and international support for these efforts. We know that much has been achieved on HIV in the past two decades, but that we still need to improve our response here in Viet Nam. We are looking forward to continuing our support to the Vietnamese Government in this challenging but crucial work against HIV together.

Thank you