

Government renews commitment to Harm Reduction

Hanoi, 28 July – On behalf of the international community, the United Nations commends the Government of Viet Nam for its strong leadership in responding to HIV and supporting harm reduction interventions.

At a high-level meeting on HIV, harm reduction and drug treatment, the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Truong Vinh Trong, Chairman of the National Committee on AIDS, Drugs and Prostitution Prevention and Control called on international partners to work with the Government of Viet Nam to expand harm reduction and drug treatment.

International experts in addiction and drug science and representatives from donors, NGOs and the United Nations joined the Deputy Prime Minister, ministers from Health and Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs and leaders from the People's Committees from 64 provinces at a symposium on HIV harm reduction and opiate dependence treatment in Hanoi.

Health Minister Nguyen Quoc Trieu said a recent study visit to Australia had demonstrated that harm reduction should be an essential part of any HIV response. Mr Trieu said harm reduction, including the methadone maintenance therapy programme currently being piloted in Hai Phong and Ho Chi Minh City, was a good way to respond to HIV and drug use in Vietnam.

“Drug addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease,” said Dr Jon Currie, a professor of addiction medicine from St Vincent’s Hospital in Melbourne, Australia. “The brain changes when people use drugs, but it can improve with the right medication.”

Dr Robert Ali, from the University of Adelaide, Australia, told the symposium that methadone maintenance therapy substantially reduces heroin use and adverse, health, legal and social consequences of heroin dependence.

UNAIDS Country Director and chair of the Joint UN Team on HIV, Mr Eamonn Murphy, said leaders of Viet Nam have been recognized globally for their strong people-centred approach to HIV prevention, care and treatment.

Increasingly, Viet Nam is adopting ‘harm reduction’ approaches to respond to HIV and drug use. The main objective of harm reduction is to mitigate potential dangers associated with risky behaviours such as injecting drug use, casual sex and sex work.

Representatives of the international community in Hanoi attended to demonstrate strong support for the Government of Viet Nam’s leadership in responding to HIV and drug use.

In Viet Nam, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNAIDS are working with the government to introduce harm reduction interventions. This work is supported by donors such as the US Government (PEPFAR), the World Bank, DfID, AusAID, the Royal Netherlands Embassy and technical partners Family Health International, Populations Services International, Health Policy Initiative, Medecins de Monde, Management Sciences for Health and others.