UN Resident Coordinator Pratibha Mehta shared her comments at the meeting

UN Resident Coordinator Pratibha Mehta and Australian Ambassador Allaster Cox, co-chairs of the Ambassadors/UN Heads of Agency Informal Coordination Group on HIV, led a representative group on 12 December to discuss future collaborations with the Government of Viet Nam in responding to HIV. The group included United States Ambassador David Shear and UK Department for International Development (DFID) Country Representative Fiona Lappin. Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, Chair of the National Committee for AIDS, Drugs and Prostitution Prevention and Control, led the Government dialogue team, including Minister of Health Nguyen Thi Kim Tien and Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Nguyen Thi Hai Chuyen.

Speaking at the meeting, Ms. Mehta praised the efforts of the Government of Viet Nam to ensure the sustainability of the national response to HIV. She highly commended Viet Nam for having increased the state budget allocation for HIV threefold over the last five years, and for approving a National Targeted Program on HIV that will help increase the state budget for HIV in 2012 by 20%, as compared to 2011.

Ambassador Allaster Cox congratulated the Government of Viet Nam for the development of a new national HIV strategy that is fully participatory with key stakeholders. He said the strategy aptly reflects the linkage between HIV, drugs and sex work and enables interventions that target key populations at higher risk of infection. However, he emphasized there is a particular need to focus on HIV prevention for these key populations, especially men who have sex with men, so Viet Nam will be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goal 6 on HIV.

Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc expressed appreciation of the technical and financial support provided by the international community in many areas of the national response, including the harm reduction programmes and drug trafficking control. He called for the international community's continued support for Viet Nam in their efforts to effectively respond to HIV in the context of decreased funding, especially for the expansion of the methadone programme that has been receiving substantial support from the United States Government.

The open and wide ranging dialogue touched upon important issues in the national response to HIV, including the need to have a multi-sectoral response to HIV that engages all relevant sectors, the need to increase effectiveness of the national response by better targeting programmes on key populations at higher risk of infection, the need to further expand evidence-informed harm reduction programmes such as methadone, needle and syringe and condom, and the improvement of the legal framework related to HIV with the recent development of the Draft Law on Administrative Sanctions. The new Law removes the measure of sending sex workers to 05 centres and includes the provision of community-based harm reduction programmes for sex workers.

Also engaged in the dialogue were PEPFAR Country Coordinator Vivian Chao, UNAIDS Country Director Eamonn Murphy, UNODC Country Representative Zhuldyz Akisheva, Vice Minister – Deputy Head of Office of the Government Nguyen Huu Vu, and representative of the Ministry of Public Security.

Following the meeting Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc hosted a dinner reception for 40 representatives of the international community.