

**Viet Nam HIV Technical Working Group Meeting  
18 July 2007 Minutes**

Venue: Viet Nam Women's Museum, 36 Ly Thuong Kiet Street  
Time: 14.00 – 16.00  
Chairperson: Le Ngoc Bao, Pathfinder  
Vice Chairperson: Peter Barnard, Médecins du Monde  
Secretary: UNAIDS  
Participants: 85 from mass organizations, Bilateral agencies, Local NGOs, INGOs, UN Agencies and Programmes, PLHIV groups, Government ministries

**1. Welcome – introductions**

Welcome and introduction of participants, welcome of Peter Barnard as new Vice Chairperson of the HIV TWG.

**2. Minutes and evaluations**

**a. Approval of the minutes of 16 May meeting:** The minutes were approved without correction.

**b. Evaluation of last meeting:** Key comments from the evaluation of the last TWG meeting were highlighted. Emphasis was placed on the high response rate and the need to allocate greater time for discussion.

**3. Brief reports from Subgroups**

The meeting folder included written reports from the following sub-groups. A brief verbal report was provided at the meeting -

- a. MSM
- b. Gender and Sexuality
- c. GIPA

**4. Main presentation: Raising Awareness for AIDS**

*Presenter: Ms. Regan Hoffman, Editor-in-Chief, POZ Magazine*

Ms. Hoffman presented her personal story, confrontation with stigma and discrimination, and activism, and stressed the need to promote awareness of AIDS, highlight the universality of prevention messages, and encourage awareness raising for advocacy efforts to increase funding. She argued that the biggest need now in the USA is to increase testing. Further, the greatest priority must be to show the many faces of PLHIV and tell their stories. People must be educated to understand that HIV is not only linked with controversial behaviors/lifestyles; stigma is the key to unlocking the epidemic.

Ms. Hoffman said that she was impressed by the Vietnamese, PLHIV, and government officials she has met. She hopes that the USA can make a positive impact in Vietnam with funding and person-power, and encouraged attendees to contact her if they feel there is anything that POZ Magazine can do to support efforts here.

**5. Main presentation: Marketing Harm Reduction**

*Presenter: Dr. David Jacka, Medical Officer Harm Reduction, WHO*

Dr. Jacka highlighted that harm reduction is an element of human rights and social justice. Harm reduction is selling the concept that people can engage in risky behaviors more safely – though it is important that the four “voices” of harm reduction are taken together as complementary components. Dr. Jacka presented four televised commercials from other nations and used them to illustrate the possibilities of putting non-controversial messages into a controversial arena. Dr

Jacka invited those at the meeting to contact WHO if they would like advice in marketing harm reduction.

**6. Discussion: Question and Answer**

Initial discussion and questions focused on the guidelines, legislation, and efficacy of methadone treatment. There was a discussion regarding methadone replacement as the most effective response to heroin addiction and that Vietnam could initially look at focused advertising for needle exchange programs, and encourage changes in thinking on the ground as well as in legislation. Guidelines on methadone therapy are currently being developed and will be discussed at a meeting next week.

Ms. Hoffman introduced the online programs that POZ magazine has innovated to connect PLHIV with supportive networks (e.g. "Mentors," on-line dating, 24-hour moderated chat rooms, and [www.ourdignity.com](http://www.ourdignity.com)). POZ also has an online directory of AIDS services and a special section on maintaining good nutrition, the latter of which is extremely important for ARV compliance and disease response.

There was also a discussion about the availability of ARVs in Vietnam and the country's greatest needs. Meeting participants raised that geographic inequality of funding, resources, and treatment is the biggest challenge. Drugs are not provided on an equal basis, rural areas and areas outside pilot programs are neglected, and people from the regions are not accepted in central hospitals. There is also a need for free testing in disadvantaged places, precise testing procedures, transparency in drug provision, and precise methadone therapy guidelines.

**5. Updates**

**a. HIV Implementers' Meeting in Kigali**

Approximately 30 delegates from Vietnam attended the HIV Implementers' meeting in Kigali. There were posters on display, in addition to presentations on mobilization, VCT, home-based testing, expansion to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> line treatment, updates on new policies, the Global Fund grant, behavioral change programming, and participation of PLHIV on all levels. Nine presentations were given by delegates from Vietnam at the meeting. A post-HIV Implementers' meeting will be held and details of this will forthcoming on the TWG e-list.

**b. Mid-term Consultative Group Meeting**

The outcomes of the mid-term Consultative Group meeting held on 1 June 2007 were presented. All are encouraged to access the Consultative Group's report, which summarizes the meeting. The next CG meeting will be held in December.

**c. Update on the Decree Implementing the Law on HIV**

The Decree 108/2007/ND-CP for the Implementation of the Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control was approved by the Prime Minister on 26 June 2007. It includes legal protections for the rights of PLHIV, as well as the means to counter stigma and discrimination. It provides social supports and allowances for HIV-positive children and clears the way for community-level harm reduction initiatives. The UN will continue working with stakeholders to provide guidelines on provisions now not covered.

**d. Forum of PLHIV to Discuss Treatment Issues**

The forum discussed a number of challenges now faced by PLHIV, including difficulties in the referral system and ARV allocation process, the lack of OI treatment guidelines and the inaccessibility of CD4 count tests. They also stressed the need to expand programs to rural areas and strengthen treatment capacity at the provincial level.

**e. Announcement of LNGO group working on HIV**

The first meeting was held with the participation of 8 local NGOs. The decision was made that a subgroup will meet once a month, and there will be a small workshop scheduled in August. At this initial stage, ISDS plays the coordinating role of this group until the identification of the chair and vice-chair.

6. **AOB**

- **GFATM Round 7 Proposal**

Eamonn Murphy provided an update on Round 7 Global Fund Proposal. . The goal of the proposal developed by MOLISA (Principal Recipient) and FHI (Sub-Recipient) is to reduce the spread of HIV among injecting drug users and commercial sex networks in 18 under-served provinces. The objectives include: to establish and scale-up a package of HIV prevention interventions in community-case settings and Treatment and Education Centers, and to strengthen capacity and coordination in Comprehensive Care Sites.

The CCM met and approved the proposal, which was then submitted to the Global Fund in Geneva.

- **8<sup>th</sup> International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) 2007**

UNAIDS will be organizing a pre-ICAAP meeting on 8 August and welcomed attendance at this meeting for participants from Viet Nam attending the 8th ICAAP meeting, which is being held 19-23 August. If anyone who is not already on the list would like to attend the meeting, they should contact UNAIDS.

- **Materials Table**

A materials table is available outside the meeting hall. All are encouraged to use it at this and future meetings to share publications and audiovisual materials. Thank you to Save the Children, ARHP, ISDS (Institute for Social Development Studies), and Smartwork Vietnam for bringing materials to this meeting.

- **Thank you to Outgoing UNAIDS Assistant Planning and Management Officer**

Many thanks were given to Lauren Schmid for all her work planning and organizing the TWG meetings of the past 6 months. She will be greatly missed. Welcome to Brenda Schuster who will take over Ms. Schmid's functions at UNAIDS.

**Time and date of next meeting:** 12 September 2007 at Women's Museum