

Opening remarks of the acting Regional Director
to be delivered by the
WHO Representative, Malaysia
at the Joint forum incorporating

CONSULTATION ON INTEGRATING
PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT
OF STI/HIV/AIDS INTO REPRODUCTIVE,
MATERNAL AND NEWBORN HEALTH
SERVICES

and the

6th ASIA-PACIFIC UNITED NATIONS
PREVENTION OF MOTHER-TO-CHILD
TRANSMISSION TASK FORCE MEETING
6-10 November 2006
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

On behalf of the acting Regional Director, I
would like to welcome you to Kuala Lumpur for
the Consultation on Integrating Prevention and
Management of STI/HIV/AIDS into Reproductive,
Maternal and Newborn Health and

the 6th United ... /

the 6th United Nations Task Force Meeting on the
Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission. I
also would like to express my appreciation to the
organizers of these back-to-back meetings,
especially the Government of Malaysia. In
addition, our thanks go out to UNAIDS, UNICEF
and the United Nations Population Fund for their
collaboration in organizing this meeting.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic continues to take a
devastating toll on individuals, families, societies
and the health systems, with an estimated 40
million people are living with the virus worldwide.
The pattern in which the epidemic is spreading
varies from region to region and country to
country. But in the Asia Pacific region, home to
some 60% of the world's population, the
implications are enormous.

The HIV ... /

The HIV prevalence rate exceeds 1%, the level at which a country is considered to have a generalized epidemic, in Papua New Guinea, where it is 1.8%, in Cambodia, where it is 1.6%, in Thailand, where it is 1.4%, and in Myanmar, where it is 1.3%. India has an estimated prevalence rate of 0.9%. But measured into absolute numbers in the world's second-largest country—and considering the potential sources of infection—this translates into a huge public health problem.

It also is important to remember the vulnerability of women and girls, both biologically and socially, to sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. Of the total number of people living with HIV, just under one half are women and girls. Children must also be a special

focus in our ... /

focus in our efforts to prevent and control HIV/AIDS.

We must take advantage of the window of opportunity available for intervention by integrating the prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS into basic reproductive, maternal and newborn health services. The nexus between maternal and newborn health on one hand and HIV on the other is now widely recognized. Fortunately, considerable progress has been made in the area of life-saving antiretroviral drugs, which are now more widely available, more affordable and more accessible to pregnant mothers, their partners and their newborns. In the absence of intervention, it is estimated that 15% to 30% of HIV-infected mothers will transmit the infection to their babies

during pregnancy or ... /

during pregnancy or delivery, and 10% to 20% through breast milk.

Experience has shown that efforts to prevent HIV infection in pregnant women and newborns are most effective if they are fully integrated into the existing health services. This means that these existing services, including family planning, antenatal care, obstetrics, delivery services, and postpartum and newborn care, have to address HIV/AIDS and have to deliver the required interventions.

Integration of HIV/AIDS prevention and control, including the other sexually transmitted infections, into reproductive, maternal and newborn services is of course a challenging task. Sexually transmitted infections greatly increase the risk of acquiring or transmitting HIV.

Therefore effective management ... /

Therefore effective management of sexually transmitted infections is one of the cornerstones of HIV control. Adequate STI management will also reduce adverse outcomes of pregnancy, such as congenital syphilis in newborns.

I am pleased that this consultation is being held consecutively with the 6th United Nations Task Force Meeting on the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission. Effective programmes for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission are very important in integrating the prevention and management of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS into reproductive, maternal and newborn health services. It is always a challenge to break down barriers, and integration certainly calls for the breaking down of barriers. In health systems that are highly compartmentalized and

hierarchical, this ... /

hierarchical, this is even more challenging. Sexually transmitted infections pose an additional challenge since people with sexually transmitted infections are more susceptible to HIV infection. Therefore, the effective management of STI is a cornerstone of HIV prevention and control.

Integration of STI and HIV/AIDS prevention and management into reproductive, maternal and newborn health must become a reality in order for us to achieve the Millennium Development Goals that call upon us to halt and reverse the transmission rates of HIV/AIDS and to reduce maternal mortality by three quarters between 1990 and 2015. In trying to meet these goals, we must maximize the use of our resources, increase the utilization of our health services, and reduce the social stigma associated with these diseases.

This consultation brings ... /

This consultation brings together a wide range of experts who can provide country experiences and help develop a framework that can support countries in their plans to integrate the prevention and management of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS efforts into their reproductive, maternal and newborn health services. On behalf of WHO, I would like to once again thank you for your commitment to this issue and encourage your endeavours. I also wish you an enjoyable stay in Kuala Lumpur.