

**Regional Partnership Forum on Children and HIV and AIDS**  
**Welcome Remarks**  
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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I have the great honour of welcoming you on behalf of UNICEF to the Regional Partnership Forum on Children and HIV and AIDS.

It is an honour to see many delegates from countries across the region, and to have representatives from governments, civil society organizations, international organisations, academe and donor agencies.

It has long been recognised that an effective response to HIV and AIDS requires a partnership approach. That no one party alone has the capacity to address the social, economic and health impact of HIV. Multi-partner collaboration is made more important when children and women – who remain the missing faces of AIDS in the region – increasingly bear the brunt of the epidemic and that there are known approaches to stop it. Your presence here, representing an array of partners, is therefore important. It is my hope over the next few days that we can reconfirm our commitment to these partnerships to prioritize our resources and energies on the most vulnerable groups. These include not only the most-at-risk populations but also their partners and children, and potentially more who will be living with HIV if we allow our current commitment to slide.

The focus of the next three days is to discuss how we can better protect children, reduce the impact of AIDS on them, as well as address factors that exacerbate vulnerabilities, putting them at risk. In doing so we need to examine whether current social protection policies, programmes and systems are adequate, whether their parents' survival is assured with long-term antiretroviral treatment and care, whether children exposed to HIV are getting tested and treated, whether pregnant women and their parents are adequately informed about prevention measures and HIV transmission risks, and whether parents, young adults and adolescents who

are at risk know how to protect themselves, and whether testing and counselling services are widely available, confidential and optional.

These questions have obvious answers except that service coverage remains inadequate, and that the prevention, treatment and care continuum – for the child - has not yet translated effectively into a strong coordination mechanism within the health system, and between health, education, judicial and social welfare systems.

A major aim of this forum is to review progress since the 2006 Regional Consultation on Children and AIDS in Hanoi, Vietnam. At this point, I think it is important to remind ourselves of the commitment that was made in Hanoi in nine key areas of action:

*First*, we need to build knowledge on the situation of children affected by AIDS. The situation across the region is not the same and that priorities and exact responses will need to vary from country to country. Undertaking situation assessments of children and HIV is critical for informing policy, programme and services response, both short- and long-term.

*Second*, we need to ensure that legislation, policy, and guidelines are updated to protect, support and care for these children, who may drop out of school, who may go hungry, and who lack parental care and are vulnerable to abuse and exploitations.

*Third*, we need to scale up the critical responses. In particular, scaling up the “Four Ps” and they are: 1) preventing mother-to-child transmission; 2) providing paediatric treatment; 3) preventing infection among adolescents and young people; and 4) protecting and supporting children affected by HIV and AIDS.

*Fourth* – and often a significant challenge – is mobilising adequate resources and improving their allocation. We absolutely need to make sure the level of resources is equal to the challenge of reaching all children infected and affected by HIV and AIDS.

*Fifth*, we need to strengthen multi-sectoral response at the national level. This includes involvement of the public sector, civil society, religious leaders and children and young people, among others.

*Sixth*, we need to reinforce measures to reduce stigma and discrimination. I have no doubt that over the next few days we will hear about how stigma and discrimination can

significantly impede children and their families in having effective access to education, health care and other essential services.

*Seventh*, we need to expand efforts to protect children and provide them with the most family-like care environment possible. I believe we still have a lot of work to do across the region to ensure that institutional care is used only as a temporary measure or option of last resort.

*Eighth*, we need to ensure that we have proper monitoring systems in place. As the HIV epidemic is constantly changing, monitoring systems provide us with the information we need to assess the effectiveness of our programmes and services and to adapt them to meet evolving situations.

*And finally*, we need to strengthen collaboration and coordination at the regional and international levels to maintain our collective commitment and enhance collective learning, which has proven to be very fruitful and highly critical.

Two years have passed since we met in Hanoi, it is time to review what has happened. What actions have we taken? The next few days will offer a unique opportunity for us to share our achievements and lessons learned. It is also an opportunity to acknowledge that there are still barriers that may have prevented us from progressing as far as we would have liked.

Last but not least, for those of us who attended the consultation in Hanoi, you may recall that the young people and children who attended had their own clear message to deliver to delegates at the official opening. They stated clearly that they hoped governments and other delegates would *take action, not just talk*.

Before concluding, I would like to thank our partners. In particular, I would like to thank the US Government, Australian Government, Swedish Sida, the UK DFID for their on-going support, and to Family Health International, Save the Children, our UN partners and UNICEF country offices for collaborating with my office in organizing this forum.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking all of *you* for coming all the way to Bangkok. I believe through *your* active participation, through the exchange of *your* ideas and experiences, through sharing the lessons *you* have learnt, we can reduce the further spread of HIV and limit its impact on children in East Asia and the Pacific region.

I look forward to working with you over the next three days.

Thank you.