

Message from Dr. Debrework Zewdie, Global AIDS Advisor, the World Bank and Chair of the UNAIDS Committee of Cosponsoring Organization, on the occasion of World AIDS Day function at the Candle Light Night ..hosted by the Thai Red Cross Society, Bangkok, December 1st, 2002

On Behalf of UNAIDS family, I would like to congratulate the Thai Red Cross Society, the government and people of Thailand for the national programme to prevent HIV transmission from mothers to children. This morning, I had the pleasure participating in the World AIDS Day function chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister Chaturong Chaisaeng. During the Opening, the Ministry of Public Health stated the prevention of mother to child transmission as one of its success stories. We have also recognized this success through a UNAIDS Best Practice publications. The increase in public awareness and contribution to supply the antiretroviral drugs for this programme has been achieved under the leadership and patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Soamsawali.

As I understand, the programme began with an intention to save lives of children. In the current vision, the Thai Red Cross Society might pilot extension of the programme to include both children and their parents. In other words, it will be a programme for protecting the family, which involves prevention of mother to child transmission, providing medicines to the children if they are infected and to their mothers and fathers who are living with HIV/AIDS. If this is the direction of the programme, I would like to express my gratitude and

admiration. The thought of this initiative brings joy and tears to my eyes, to see children continue living with their mothers and fathers. In this respect, the infected parents will live longer to raise their children and see their children grow. The children will continue living with love and care with their parents. It is truly a family living with HIV/AIDS. Of course, this extension of the programme requires medicines and related health care services. However, the quality of life of children and their parents will not be achieved without a progressive campaign to reduce stigma and discrimination in the communities. I am certain that with commitment of the government and resources from public donation and support from all partners including people living with HIV/AIDS, all of these can be achieved.

It is wonderful to see many people gathered on this special event. Together at this Candle Light Night, we stand in solidarity with millions of others around the world for the 2002 World AIDS Day's commitment to fight stigma and discrimination. I hope we continue to find a better way to support every child and family to live together and to be living with HIV/AIDS with quality of life and dignity.

42 million people are living with HIV/AIDS in the world. More than one child is dying every minute of AIDS. 7 million are living with HIV/AIDS in Asia/Pacific and the number is increasing. Dr. Peter Piot, the Executive Director of UNAIDS said, "Asia holds the key to the global AIDS epidemic". Asia could have the largest problem in terms of size of infected and affected populations. However, Asia could also bring innovative

programmes and commitment that hold a key to success of the global AIDS response. UNAIDS is pleased for the long-standing and close collaboration it shares with the Thai Red Cross Society, the government of Thailand and the community. We are looking forward to witnessing and disseminating the success that Thailand will hopefully continue to bring.

Thank you