



WOMEN'S NETWORK FOR UNITY

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Cambodian Civil Society Expresses Progress Concerns on World AIDS Day

Nine HIV and AIDS NGO Networks say treatment costs, discrimination and stigma, human rights abuses, and inadequate sector funding are compromising HIV and AIDS response efforts

As the world marks World AIDS Day, Cambodian civil society organizations working on HIV and AIDS have expressed concern that Cambodia may not reach its Millennium Development Goal 6 targets by 2015, despite the success of the nation's HIV and AIDS response to date.

In a joint statement issued by the HIV/AIDS Coordinating Committee (HACC) to the Royal Government of Cambodia and other key stakeholders, nine HIV and AIDS NGO networks say that a lack of comprehensive treatment provisions, discrimination and human rights abuses towards people living with HIV, and persistently high rates of infection among 'most at risk populations' - such as direct and indirect sex workers, drug users, men who have sex with men and transgender people – have the potential to undermine progress and demand substantial attention and resources.

The calls follow the presentation of a United Nations Millennium Development Award to the Royal Government of Cambodia for outstanding achievements in combating HIV in September 2010. The nation's prevalence rates are now at 0.7%, a dramatic reduction from in 2% in 1998. Additionally, over 90% of all Cambodian adults living with HIV now receive treatment.

Despite these achievements, the HIV and AIDS NGO networks say that in order to ensure these gains are long-term and sustainable, high impact interventions and comprehensive treatment services that address the needs of the maturing epidemic remain critical. With international funds for the HIV response in Cambodia likely to decrease in coming years, civil society is also calling for the development of new financing solutions for the sector.

As Executive Director for the HIV/AIDS Coordinating Committee, Mr Tim Vora explains; "Cambodia's HIV and AIDS response has had great success, but we cannot afford to become complacent. There are still unacceptably high rates of infection among sections of Cambodian society, and many people living with HIV are unable to afford essential treatment or meet living and nutrition costs. What's more, stigma and discrimination from health workers, human rights abuses from authorities and legal barriers to education and prevention interventions are undermining essential treatment and prevention efforts."

Key recommendations from the statement include:

- The provision of high level comprehensive healthcare services, including consultation, hospitalization and laboratory testing to all people living with HIV free of charge;
- The creation of “safe spaces” to deliver HIV education, prevention services and packages, and Voluntary Confidential Counseling and Testing (VCCT) services for ‘most at risk populations’ without fear of arrest harassment or penalty;
- The establishment of a national human rights focused network specifically for people living with HIV and “most at risk populations” to ensure that these groups can report and document human rights abuses and access adequate legal support;
- Increasing medium to long term domestic funding for high impact prevention programmes and comprehensive healthcare services;
- The establishment of a working group to devise medium to long term funding strategies that shift dependency away from international donors and move the focus to mobilizing resources from the private sector, local donors and local revenue streams.

Issued by the HIV/AIDS Coordinating Committee (HACC) the statement’s network signatories include; the Antiretroviral Users Association (AUA), The National Men who have Sex with Men network/Bandanh Chaktomuk (BC), the Cambodian Business Coalition on AIDS (CBCA), The Cambodian Community of Women living with HIV and AIDS (CCW), The Cambodian Network of People Living with HIV (CPN+), The Khmer HIV and AIDS NGO Alliance, the drug users network Korsang, and the Women’s Network for Unity (WNU).

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