



**Remarks by UNAIDS Country Coordinator, Marie-Odile Emond,
on Behalf of the United Nations Country Team and UN Joint Team on AIDS in
Cambodia
On the Occasion of
World AIDS Day 2013**

- *H.E. Ke Kim Yan, Deputy Prime Minister*
- *Excellency Mr Ieng Mouly, Senior Minister and Chair of the National AIDS Authority,*
- *Excellency Dr. Mam Bun Heng, Minister of Health,*
- *Distinguished Members and Officials from the Senate, National Assembly and the Royal Government,*
- *Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

This year, World AIDS Day directly follows the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP, 18-22 November, Bangkok). The buzz words heard along the ICAAP halls where about 3,000 people mingled to discuss HIV strategies were *Focus on Sex workers, Men who have sex with men, Injecting drug users, Transgender and People living with HIV.*

The global and regional updates on the HIV epidemic were mixed: though sustained progress against HIV is noted globally with declining new infections and nearly over 10 million people on treatment, the pace of progress is slow. In the Asia-Pacific region, over the past 5 years, the number of new infections remains largely unchanged. While some countries have reduced new HIV infections by over 50% since 2001 (Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Papua New Guinea and Thailand), the epidemic is growing in others (Pakistan, Indonesia and the Philippines). The strategies agreed at the ICAAP were clear:

FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS programmes and investments on key areas and populations at higher risk

Optimize investment

Innovate service delivery

Keep the community at the center

Reduce stigma, discrimination and gender issues

Cambodia can be proud. Its sustained commitment on AIDS from the highest level, clear and ambitious vision, about 80% of treatment coverage for people who need it, and innovative approaches to testing and treatment remain an inspiration to others. And 2013 has been a pivotal year for a further leap forward: the Cambodia 3.0 framework to eliminate new HIV infections by 2020 is being rolled out by the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology and STD, including new approaches for more targeted outreach to key populations. Cambodia is among the first few countries piloting voluntary community-based HIV testing. Many existing services are being improved including: simpler HIV testing, the use of antiretroviral treatment to prevent new infections, better collaboration with other programmes such as tuberculosis and intensified efforts to integrate sexual and reproductive health services for key populations into HIV programming.

However, progress is not success yet. Though many Cambodians have been on HIV treatment since over 10 years and lead a productive and healthy life like anyone else, many others who are infected still do not know their status, come very late for testing when their immunity is already seriously affected or are not able to take the daily treatment they need. Indeed, an alarming new trend is the small rise in AIDS-related deaths as the number of people living with HIV has increased and lifelong retention on treatment is not easy.

We have learned and made progress in other areas of what we call the enabling environment in 2013. Silence has been broken around gender-based and sexual violence but more action is urgently needed. A recent review of the national HIV-related legal framework led by the National AIDS Authority with UNAIDS highlighted some good protective laws but also others that still hamper key affected populations' rights and access to services. The Police-Community Partnership initiative is being rolled out promoting local dialogue between law enforcement officials, local authorities and community groups.

Indeed, a normal night at work for an entertainment worker can easily go wrong and end with harassment, detention or violence. A normal day might seem hopeless for a person who injects drugs and lives on the street with no strength left to find the still limited harm reduction services. A normal day can turn into a day of rejection for a transgender person trying to find work, or a shorter life for a prison detainee living with HIV with no access to treatment. A normal evening out can be risky for a young man who has sex with men. The birth of a child remains a miracle but no child should start life with HIV, as parent-to-child transmission is now easily preventable. Too often, HIV affected populations remain marginalized and face social exclusion, limiting their access to health, education, employment, and other services. No-one should experience discrimination because of who they are, their sexual orientation or an infection. We can change that and UNAIDS is launching a worldwide *#Zero discrimination* campaign to generate public support and change to end discrimination.

Change comes through policies and programmes but also mostly from the HIV community groups who know best the reality. They are creative and increasingly contribute to programme development, service delivery and key policy decisions. They advise on solutions that work for them and help thousands of Cambodians affected by HIV make it through their days and nights. The HIV community reminds us repeatedly how it is possible to overcome HIV-related stigmatization and discrimination and live with dignity and pride. A key element of Cambodia's AIDS response success is the strong dialogue and partnership between the Government, the policy-makers and civil society including community groups.

Worldwide, December 1st is a day of hope but also a day of mourning for the millions of people who have died from AIDS in over 32 years of the epidemic. It is also a time to thank all the thousands of individuals, families, communities and governments across the world, working together with political or personal will, commitment, intelligence and compassion, to turn back the epidemic and provide support for a better life for people living with or affected by HIV.

Very symbolically for World AIDS Day this year, members of the Cambodian HIV community show us again their courage and determination and inspire us all through participating today in the Angkor Wat International Half Marathon.

Cambodia is on a journey towards *Zero new HIV infections, Zero AIDS-related deaths and Zero discrimination*. The journey includes known and still unknown hills to climb but one day, Cambodia will reach those *Three Zeros*. Together with the Royal Government of Cambodia, communities, civil society, and other development partners, the UN system and in particular its Joint Team on HIV/AIDS is committed and proud to stand behind you to achieve those Zeros and ensure no one is left behind for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support

Thank you.

