

*Thursday 28 February, 2008 Hai Phong, Viet Nam*

If we don't know where we are, we can never work out where we are going. Six months ago, in August 2007, we held the first ever National GIPA Workshop in Viet Nam. In those two days we set our course, and marked our destination. We affirmed where we are going and, just as importantly, we set out the path we would follow to get there.

People living with HIV are, and must be, at the heart of the response to HIV. No exceptions. The Call to Action that emerged from that first GIPA Workshop has plotted our course for us. Our major goals: increasing Universal Access to prevention, treatment, care and support and meaningful involvement of PLHIV in developing, implementing and monitoring HIV programmes and their participation in decision-making processes. And our major challenges, the winds that can blow us off course: tokenism, exclusion, stigma, discrimination, silence.

At this meeting we have a chance to rest, gather around, pull out our charts and see how far we have gotten, how far we still have to go. How close are we to the points we have marked? Did we let our many challenges blow us off course or did we learn, mid-stream, to trim our sails?

Increased access to services: Thanks to the continued support of UNV, PEPFAR and other donors, and with PLHIV at the heart and helm of change, universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support services has improved tremendously nation-wide. The GIPA project has been very successful in linking with different partners and working within the community to reduce stigma and discrimination, raise awareness, strengthen referral services and build the capacity of PLHIV to participate meaningfully in HIV activities.

The Greater involvement of PLHIV (GIPA): The GIPA project has conducted numerous trainings, and PLHIV have been active and visible from televised World AIDS Day events to engagement with leaders and healthcare providers. Most notably, there was active PLHIV involvement in the civil society consultation on the UNGASS report, and subsequently three PLHIV representatives participated in the national consensus workshop. Following these events, the VAAC re-confirmed their interest in supporting GIPA. Workshops to further discuss the involvement of civil society organizations and PLHIV should be forthcoming.

These achievements are impressive. But there is still a long way to go. We must continue pushing our agenda forward, and resist discouragement. We must remember that our greatest strength is in our partnerships – the driving force that is the Women's Union, UNV, and UNAIDS working together. We must continue with capacity building. We must continuously monitor and evaluate our progress. This annual review workshop, as well as the upcoming project review, provide opportunities to further increase the impact of our work.

This journey that we have chosen to make is not an easy one. At times we may seem to be moving and moving and moving but going nowhere. Or, we may set off with one point in our sights but end up in another spot entirely. That is the nature of journeys. I suspect that, by the time we have reached our destination – for we will, I have no doubt, get where we have decided to go – we will have learned and achieved much more than we'd anticipated. That is also the

nature of journeys.

I would like to congratulate all those involved in the GIPA project and commend them for the excellent work they have done. Our profound thanks to UNV, PEPFAR and other donors for their tremendous support. Let's take this opportunity of being together again to look back and see how far we have come. And let's unroll our map, the GIPA Call to Action, and decide on the currents, the direction, the vessels that will take us along the next leg.

Thank you for listening. I am sorry that I cannot attend tomorrow's session. I hope that your planning will be successful, and that we will stay on course. Enjoy this afternoon and chuc suc khoe.