

Vice Minister General Tiem, Brigadier Minh, officers and staff of the Ministry of Public Health, colleagues and friends.

Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me to address you today.

As you know, the first of December will be the 20th anniversary of World AIDS Day. Here in Viet Nam, however, we are in the midst of the National AIDS Action Month. I would like to recognize and praise Viet Nam for stepping beyond international norms and expectations to commemorate the response to HIV, not just on a single day or a week as many nations do, but throughout an entire month of action. This shows the energy and mobilization of all parts of society. It also highlights the commitment and care of the Government. Vice Minister General Tiem, Brigadier Minh, officers and staff of the Ministry of Public Health, colleagues and friends.

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I have great respect for the Vietnamese people's love for their country. As I have learned, when the people of Viet Nam speak of patriotism they are not referring to merely a flag, a song or a set of symbols. They are referring to people. The hearts of the people are the foundation of Vietnamese national policy. For those of us who have dedicated our lives to stopping HIV, it is a remarkable opportunity to partner with a Government who considers the people's welfare their greatest national treasure.

Public security officers have a great responsibility to protect the people. I applaud you for working so hard to fight crime and reduce the supply of drugs. I also thank you for helping protect the people from the dangers they cannot see – HIV and stigma and discrimination. As international experience shows us, fear and misinformation push HIV underground and cause it to spread more quickly. Police officers are essential partners in making sure that community members who need them are able to access key prevention tools.

The theme for this year's World AIDS Day is leadership – lead, empower, deliver. During this month of action, the Government of Viet Nam calls upon all members of society – and particularly those at the community level – to be leaders. Teachers should take the lead to protect the right of children affected by HIV to attend school. Healthcare workers should take the lead to respect confidentiality and give PLHIV equal access to treatment. Public security officers can take the lead to support community-based harm reduction and training on HIV and harm reduction in closed settings. As Vice Minister Tiem said, it is equally important to educate officers and staff on how to protect themselves from HIV.

I encourage MOPS to continue efforts to harmonise the implementation of the Law on HIV and

the Law on Drugs. I also encourage the ministry to continue supporting staff and residents in prisons, rehabilitation centres and other closed settings with HIV training and services. MOPS support is critical to the success of community-based harm reduction. We must work together to help drug users and sex workers access clean needles and syringes, condoms, access to HIV counselling and testing, and treatment for sexually-transmitted infections. This will prevent them from becoming infected with HIV and will further prevent the spread of HIV to others in the community.

Although it is illegal to take illicit drugs and sell and buy sex, it is not illegal to access HIV services. Drug users and sex workers have the legal right to participate in harm reduction interventions like needle and syringe programmes. Public security officers are encouraged to work in coordination with other ministries, especially the Ministry of Health, to support them to do so. This is the surest way to protect all people in society from HIV-related harm.

I am confident that by building the foundation of the HIV response on the hearts of the people, and by addressing HIV with community mobilisation and coordinated leadership at all levels of Government and society, Viet Nam can respond to HIV in time to meet its Millennium Development Goal commitments (Goal No.6: to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV by 2015).

Thank you for helping key populations at higher risk of HIV protect themselves from HIV.

Thank you for your kind attention. Chuc suc khoe.