

*Tuesday 27 November, 2007 Ha Noi, Viet Nam*

Lieutenant General Ong Le The Tiem, Vice Minister of Public Security, Colonel Le Van Minh, Colonel Ngoan, colleagues and friends from VAAC and MOPS. Thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of the UN.

In his statement for World AIDS Day, the UN Secretary-General said, "AIDS is a disease unlike any other. It is a social issue, a human rights issue, an economic issue...It does to society what HIV does to the human body -- reduces resilience and weakens capacity, hampers development and threatens stability."

I think that HIV, the social disease that has affected so much of the world, has encountered a worthy adversary in the party, ministries, and people of Viet Nam. I admire the Vietnamese people tremendously. You have struggled long and hard through wars, hunger and loss. Now your country is independent, with a strong and growing economy. It has become a member of the World Trade Organisation and will soon achieve the status of middle income country. It has even become a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. If any people are equipped to challenge HIV and win, it is the people of Viet Nam. As Ho Chi Minh himself once said, "The storm is a good opportunity for the pine and the cypress to show their strength and their stability."

I also admire the leaders in the Party and Government who are fighting tirelessly for their people. Leadership, the theme for this year's World AIDS Day, is well-exemplified by the passage of Party Directive No.54, the Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control, the Law on Domestic Violence and the National Strategy on HIV and AIDS.

And of course, I am here this morning out of admiration for Viet Nam's fine police force. You have the weighty task – sometimes dangerous and too often thankless – of protecting society from itself; from its own dangers. In this era of HIV you are needed more than ever. I see you "taking the lead" and strengthening multisectoral collaboration, pushing forward the harm reduction program of action and learning from international example, and now I understand why in Viet Nam you are called the "people's police."

I have come to sincerely admire Vietnamese culture and values. The people of Viet Nam act from both their head and their heart, together as one. From their hearts: compassion for those affected by HIV. From their heads: an understanding that simple prevention measures can stop HIV. These measures include peer education, methadone replacement and access to condoms and clean needles – all measures that depend on the MOPS for success.

In honour of World AIDS Day, I call upon you this morning to take the lead from your hearts, and with your heads, to end stigma and discrimination and make harm reduction successful. The support of the Ministry of Public Security is absolutely crucial to slowing the spread of HIV. Isn't it said in Viet Nam that with patience and determination a man can move a whole mountain and fill an entire ocean?

The UN looks forward to continuing to work with MOPS and supports you in achieving the five objectives outlined by Vice Minister LeThe Tiem and detailed by Colonel Le Van Minh today. Thank you again for your work, your leadership and your service to your people. You have my greatest admiration and I applaud you for “taking the lead.”

Xin Cam on and truc suc khoe.