

Deputy Prime Minister Truong Vinh Trong, Minister of Health Nguyen Quoc Trieu, Director of Viet Nam Administration for AIDS Control Nguyen Thanh Long, HIV peer educators and collaborators at the grass roots level, representatives of Government ministries, the international community, local organisations and the media, good afternoon.

I am honoured to have this opportunity today to address our partners at the grassroots level and express, in my own words, my appreciation for your outstanding contributions. Thanks to your hard work, Viet Nam has moved closer to realising the theme of this year's World AIDS Day: Universal Access (to HIV services) and human rights. Thanks to you, hundreds of injecting drug users have been able to access clean needle and syringes, counselling, support and Methadone therapy. Thanks to you, access to ARV treatment and prevention of mother-to-child transmission has increased fifty percent in two years. Almost half of all people who need it are now on therapy, and hundreds of children who might have been born with HIV, will now live to raise children of their own.

Viet Nam has a saying that one tree does not make a forest but three trees can. We need to work together. Even though you are from all different regions and ethnic populations of Viet Nam; even though your lives are very different, you are united in one cause. It is this spirit, this Dien Hong spirit that embraces the 'we', instead of elevating the 'I' that will give Viet Nam the power to halt and reverse the spread of HIV.

I would like to recognise the Viet Nam Administration for AIDS Control for having been able to build and maintain such a strong network of staff, peer educators and collaborators working on HIV. I would like to recognise every Vietnamese who has joined you in the movement to mobilise action against HIV in every commune across the whole country, and I encourage more to do so. Only when everyone makes effort and takes action in the response to HIV, can Viet Nam speed up the national response and achieve Universal Access (to comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, care and support).

Most of all, I would like to recognise you, the workers at the grassroots, for focusing on, as the Buddha once said, not what has been done, but what remains to be done. And for following the guidance of your heart. You are national response to HIV's most vital partners.

You go to forgotten places and give hope to people who think they are forgotten: the woman working in the back room of a karaoke bar; the man under a bridge preparing a dirty syringe. You sit down in parks, fields, living rooms and cafes to patiently explain about HIV, again and again. You cross social and cultural boundaries. You ignore taboos.

When a child is abandoned, when a mother is afraid, when a father is desperate, you are the first person they call. You show the way to user-friendly services. You provide advice and make appointments with the health clinic. You walk children to school and stand there until the school opens its doors. You prepare funerals. You burn money. You share grief.

Do not think that just because you work at the grassroots, your effect stays at the grassroots. I once accompanied a high-level delegation to Hai Phong, to look at the Methadone clinics there. A member of our delegation went up to a peer educator and said, 'Thank you for using our

policies so well.'

The peer educator, a very active man who once used drugs himself, responded with, 'Thank you for using our experiences to write your policies so well.'

Methadone wouldn't be a success without you. Few programmes would be. What you do on an individual level impacts all Vietnamese people on a national level. You turn policies into practices and you feed your experiences and lessons learned into the review and revision of those policies.

Truly, there is no response to HIV without you. You are the nation's pulse, and you are its conscience. You set a standard that every Vietnamese should strive to follow. We in the international community will continue to be on your side and support you and your work. Please don't give up.

Xin cam on and chuc suc khoe.