



**SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM
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STATEMENT

**by H.E. Mr. PHAM GIA KHIEM, Deputy Prime Minister
of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam**

at the High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on HIV/AIDS

(New York, 2/6/2006)

Mr. President,

At the outset, allow me, on behalf of the Vietnamese Government, to extend a warmest welcome to Mr. President and all delegates attending the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on HIV/AIDS.

Humankind today is at a crucial stage in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In the last five years, the number of HIV-infected people, especially in developing countries, has continued to rise. HIV prevention programmes have yet to reach the most vulnerable groups. Four of the six global targets stated in our Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS are still far from being achieved, and little progress has been made in developing new drugs and vaccines. All these make the picture of our combat against this pandemic gloomy as it is. National leaders' growing concern about HIV/AIDS, increased financing for HIV programmes in developing nations, improving capabilities in preventing the HIV/AIDS spread in various countries as well as steady progress in the treatment are encouraging signs. However, we are by no means less concerned about our ability to drive back the pandemic in the next 10 years. That is why all of us shoulder the responsibility to hammer out bolder and more effective measures to achieve the targets set in the 2001 Declaration of Commitment. The Vietnamese Delegation believes that this Meeting, with a high sense of cooperation and responsibility, will produce more effective measures to curb the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The Government of Viet Nam has always been determined to implement the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS. Fully aware of the danger of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the Government and people of Viet Nam have early responded to the fight against HIV/AIDS with strong preventive measures. In 1995, the Ordinance on HIV/AIDS prevention and combat was promulgated by the National Assembly Standing Committee. This month, the Law on the prevention of and combat against HIV/AIDS will be adopted, which helps create changes in addressing complex issues such as interventions for harm reduction, non-discrimination, health insurance for people living with HIV/AIDS, etc. In the last 5 years, concrete measures have been taken by the Government to combat HIV/AIDS and positive results have been recorded. The Government of Viet Nam has also adopted the National HIV/AIDS Prevention Strategy until 2010 and Vision 2020. This is a multi-sectoral strategy that identifies the goals, targets and solutions to bring together all organisations and social strata in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The National Committee on HIV/AIDS Prevention headed by a Deputy Prime Minister has been established. The Committee is comprised of 18 members representing Government agencies and mass organisations. At the same time, religious, charity, non-governmental and other mass organisations as well as communities and people living with HIV/AIDS have actively participated in the IEC campaigns, providing moral and physical support, care and treatment for infected people. These activities have indeed helped reduce discrimination and stigma against the people living with HIV/AIDS. It suffices to say that Viet Nam has succeeded in mobilizing the entire political system and the people in this endeavour.

Strong, uniform and systematic preventive measures have also been undertaken nation-wide. IEC and behaviour-changing programmes have been implemented at the grass-root level. Public awareness has been raised substantially. Preventive programmes, such as condom-using and peer education schemes, targeting high-risk groups have been launched widely. Importance has been attached to preventive education for highly-movable and youth groups as well as on- and off-campus awareness education for youth and adolescence. Programmes to prevent mother-to-child transmission, infection through blood transfusion and medical equipments as well as other programmes on youth and gender equality have been implemented comprehensively. The issue of HIV anti-retroviral treatment (ART) has been attached with proper attention and investment. The treatment system has been formed and medical services for AIDS patients have been improved. Voluntary test counselling offices have been established nation-wide even at the district level. This service is fully accessible for everybody and people living with HIV/AIDS can have free-of-charge examination and treatment. The number of AIDS patients receiving anti-retroviral treatment is increasing and estimated to reach 7,000 by the end of this year.

Efforts to eliminate discrimination and stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS are strongly promoted. Forums on discrimination and stigma have been organized with the participation of people from all strata. Vietnamese laws affirm the equal rights of people living with HIV/AIDS and the priorities given to the vulnerable groups, especially in accessing medical and other social services.

The number of AIDS patients receiving ART treatment is increasing and the spread of HIV/AIDS during the last three years has seen signs of slowdown. Thanks to these efforts over the past 15 years, the epidemic is under control within the high-risk groups. The current prevalence is estimated at 0.25%. It is our target to control the prevalence below 0.3% by 2010. This success would not have been possible without the strong political will, the active participation of the whole political system and society as well as of the people living with HIV/AIDS themselves in prevention activities, and last but not least, the assistance of the international community, especially the UN organizations. However, in Viet Nam, there are more than 107,000 people living with HIV and over 10,000 people have died of AIDS. It is estimated that the number of HIV/AIDS infected cases will amount to over 310,000. That danger poses enormous challenges to Viet Nam, compelling us to have a stronger determination and more effective measures aimed at improving perception, coordination, institutional arrangements, capacity and mobilizing necessary resources.

The challenges facing us, first and foremost, include access to preventive services. In reality, access to such preventive services as voluntary test consultation and provision of syringes and needles and condoms sometimes were not available. Perception in harm reduction is still controversial, hindering harm reduction interventions.

Health care system at the central and provincial levels is reaching its capacity while that at the district level in some areas falling short of the requirement for patient treatment and care. ARV medicines, funded by state budget and international organizations' aid, just satisfy 30% of the need for treatment. Viet Nam has the capacity to produce ARV domestically, but access to cheap ARV medicines is still difficult due to international regulations on patent which prevent people living with HIV/AIDS from gaining access to ARV medicines.

It is also important to mention financial and human resource limitations facing HIV/AIDS programmes. Although investment earmarked for HIV/AIDS programmes has increased, the amount is still falling behind requirement.

With the international community, the Vietnamese Government is committed itself to continue to:

1. Fully implement provisions of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS of the UN Special Session on HIV/AIDS and the MDGs to drive back HIV/AIDS by 2015.
2. Increase Government's leadership at all levels in HIV/AIDS prevention and control and incorporate HIV/AIDS prevention and control into the national socio-economic development strategy.
3. Mobilize organizations and individuals in HIV/AIDS prevention and control activities. Encourage social, religious, charity and non-governmental organizations, businesses and especially vulnerable groups and people living with HIV/AIDS to play a greater role in HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

4. Double efforts to eliminate discrimination and stigma to ensure equal treatment, access to health and social services and State's supportive policies for people living with HIV/AIDS, and to ensure that HIV/AIDS programmes will cover, with attention, vulnerable groups, the youth and the issue of gender equality.
5. Augment Government's investment in HIV/AIDS programmes and the number of patients having access to specific medicines in line with the objectives set by the UN Declaration.

Mr. President,

Experiences of the past five years show that for us to fulfil our commitments in the 2001 Declaration, we need:

First and foremost, the constant commitment and engagement of the national leaders, broad participation of the entire society and an inter-sectoral approach at the national level. Nations should intensify efforts to eliminate discrimination and help people living with HIV/AIDS better integrate into the society. Special attention should be paid to the increasing concern over the issue of children and HIV/AIDS. In this regard, Viet Nam organized the first ever East Asia and Pacific Regional Consultation on Children and HIV/AIDS in Viet Nam in March 2006.

Secondly, better coordination among donors and international organizations in mobilizing and using resources to assist developing nations in the implementation of HIV/AIDS prevention programmes, particularly their treatment capacity. The international community, including the business sector, should ease the conditions for developing nations to gain better access to generic drugs. Technical cooperation, research and development of new types of medicine and vaccine should also be enhanced.

Thirdly, increased regional and sub-regional cooperation to prevent and control the cross-border spread of HIV/AIDS. In this regard, it is necessary to include the issue of HIV/AIDS prevention in the cooperation programmes of regional and sub-regional arrangements.

Viet Nam is committed itself to working closely with all countries and international organizations in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Thank you./.