

**SIXTH ANNUAL MEETING**



**Asia Pacific Forum of National Human Rights  
Institutions**

**"A Partnership For Human Rights In Our Region"**

**HIV / AIDS & HUMAN RIGHTS**

**24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2001  
Colombo, Sri Lanka**

## BACKGROUND

In the twenty years since the first cases of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome were reported there have been almost 22 million AIDS-related deaths and a further 36 million cases of HIV infection.<sup>1</sup>

In the Asia and Pacific regions there are some 6.4 million people living with HIV/AIDS.<sup>2</sup> The extent of the epidemic across the region can be broadly categorised as *established* (Thailand, Cambodia, Burma/Myanmar, Laos), *exploding* (India, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, China and possibly Vietnam and Sri Lanka), and *emerging* (Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia).

Respect for the human rights of people living with HIV / AIDS or at risk of infection is critical to the prevention and successful treatment of the disease. Significant HIV / AIDS-related human rights issues include advancement of the right to health, the right to education, the right to privacy, the right to equality and non-discrimination and the right to information and education.

The United Nations Joint Program on HIV / AIDS, UNAIDS, has identified AIDS as "a fundamental issue of human security" and has called on non-government organisations, national human rights institutions, other UN agencies and governments and international organisations to address HIV / AIDS-related human rights issues.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Mary Robinson, has emphasised the importance of "... the integration of HIV / AIDS and human rights into institutional strategies and programmes at national, regional and international levels, as a means to effectively respond to the epidemic."<sup>4</sup>

National human rights institutions have been identified by UNAIDS as having a critical role to play in addressing HIV/AIDS-related human rights issues. According to UNAIDS there are five ways in which national human rights institutions can strengthen their work regarding HIV/AIDS:

1. Investigating violations of human rights that occur in the context of HIV/AIDS;
2. Conducting public inquiries focusing on HIV / AIDS related human rights violations;
3. Receiving, and where appropriate redressing complaints of HIV / AIDS-related human rights violations;
4. Providing advice and assistance to governments in the area of human rights and HIV/AIDS;
5. Conducting human rights education in the context of HIV/AIDS.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "20 Years On: The Situation in Asia and the Pacific" Website of the Sixth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, 7 June 2001 at [http://www.icaao.conf.au/news/200106\\_20years.asp](http://www.icaao.conf.au/news/200106_20years.asp)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Speech by Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS to the 57th Session on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Geneva, 11 April 2001

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Press Release, *High Commissioner for Human Rights says World AIDS Day is a Call to Action to Put Treatment and Prevention Within Reach of All*. HR/P8/92, 30 November 1998

<sup>5</sup> Statement by Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS to the International Coordinating Committee of National

## ASIA PACIFIC FORUM REGIONAL WORKSHOP

Since its establishment in 1996 the Forum has demonstrated that with more intensified and coordinated action among relevant institutions in the region, including national human rights institutions, governments and NGOs, there is an opportunity to practically contribute to improving the human rights of people in the Asia Pacific. Such actions include development of new policies and procedures, joint statements, exchanges of information and strengthened institutional and personal linkages.

In seeking to develop a more coordinated strategy to the human rights dimensions of HIV / AIDS, the Forum has organized a regional workshop -*HIV / AIDS and Human Rights: The Role of National Human Rights Institutions in the Asia Pacific*. The workshop will be held in Melbourne, Australia, from 7-8 October 2001.

The workshop is being staged within the larger meeting of the Sixth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) which will be held in Melbourne from 5-10 October 2001. The Forum workshop will bring together approximately 80 participants from Forum-member institutions, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNAIDS, governments, human rights non-government organisations and relevant human rights and other regional institutions.

The program for the workshop will focus on HIV / AIDS-related human rights issues - including the right to health, the right to education, the right to equality and non-discrimination and the right to information and education -and how the core functions of national human rights institutions -complaint handling and investigation, education and promotion and legal reform -can address these issues.

The workshop will also address regional issues of concern including population mobility, commercial sex, conflict and displacement. A significant issue for discussion is the connection between abusive forms of migration, such as trafficking, and HIV / AIDS. In recent years the Forum and the OHCHR have made preliminary commitments to preventing trafficking at a regional level. At the 4th Annual Meeting of the Forum in Manila in 1999, the Forum agreed to the identification of 'focal points on trafficking' within each member institution.

The Forum intends that the workshop should be practical in its approach. The **goal** of the workshop is to enhance awareness of and cooperation on HIV / AIDS-related human rights issues in the Asia Pacific region through the promotion and strengthening of national human rights institutions.

The specific **objectives** of the workshop are

- to increase the understanding of the role of national human rights institutions in the promotion and protection of the rights of people living with HIV / AIDS and addressing HIV/AIDS-related human rights issues through (a) enabling discussion of issues (b) facilitating joint activity on issues and in areas of mutual interest and commitment, and (c) encouraging the development of joint projects, training programs and staff exchanges
- to develop practical strategies for national human rights institutions to use in addressing HIV / AIDS-related human rights issues.

## **WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

It is expected that there will be approximately 80 participants in the Meeting including:

### **Forum Members (8)**

One participant each from the eight Forum member commissions (Australia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines and Sri Lanka);

### **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2)**

Two representatives from the OHCHR;

### **UNAIDS (2)**

Two representatives from UNAIDS;

### **Relevant Institutions (6)**

Institutions whose work is relevant to the work of the Forum will be invited to the meeting. Within the region, this includes the newly established National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia, Thailand and South Korea. Other relevant institutions to be invited include the Hong Kong Equal Opportunities Commission, the Islamic Human Rights Commission of Iran and the Malaysian Human Rights Commission.

### **Governments (27)**

Representatives from regional governments will be invited to attend the meeting including -Australia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, East Timor, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Korea, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Kingdom of Tonga, Vanuatu and Vietnam. Many of these governments will be sending representatives for the main sessions of the ICAAP meeting and it is expected that a number of these people will attend the workshop.



