



***Remarks by Mr Serge Verniau,
UN Resident Coordinator a.i. in the Lao PDR***

***At the National Review on National Strategy Plan
on HIV/AIDS/STI 2006-2010***

21 June 2010 at Electiricty Camp Thalad, Vientiane Province

Your Excellency Dr. Ponmek Dalaloy, Minister of Health

Dr. Boun Kouang Phichith, Vice-Minister of Health,

Ms. Sengdeuane Lachanthaboun, Vice-Minister of Education,

Distinguished Participants,

I will have the pleasure to speak on behalf of the UN Resident Coordinator, Madame Sonam and on behalf of the JUNT on AIDS which as many know, brings together the entire resident and non-resident UN Agencies involved in supporting the Lao PDR in its HIV Response.

Excellency, Members of the NCCA, the last 4 days have been very busy sharing information and experience about the HIV situation and response. Looking back at the accomplishments as well as the challenges in the context of the targets set by the country to reach Universal Access on prevention, treatment, care and support by 2010 with key planners and implementers have been very instructive exercises for the Joint UN Team on AIDS.

Presentations and discussions about the epidemiological situation were an opportunity for all of us to better understand the trends in the HIV epidemic, the emerging determinant factors and the progress made in implementing an ambitious HIV response.

Looking at the epidemic it was good to see that the country has managed to keep the HIV prevalence at a low level in the general population and at a level below 3% in most at risk populations such as Service Women, MSM and Drug Users.

No doubt that the efforts of the country to implement a strong HIV Response have contributed to this result. Looking only at the first semester of the year, the commitment and leadership of the members of the NCCA and the hard work of its Secretariat at both the national and provincial level has allowed:

- The preparation and the timely launch of the UNGASS Country Report 2008/9;
- The design and implementation of a number of essential studies looking at vulnerability and risk behavior of key populations of higher risk of HIV infections;
- The review of the HIV policy guidelines;
- The drafting of the HIV law which has been presented this week to the National Assembly;
- Not to forget the successful preparation of a Global Fund proposal (RCC4 USD 11 millions) which will allow the implementation of critical interventions on prevention, treatment care and support;
- Finally, the preparation of the new national strategic plan 2011/2015 aligned with the 7th Health sector development plan with new strategies designed to scale up key interventions addressing emerging issues;

What is impressive is that all these initiatives were conducted while ensuring the delivery of essential services to vulnerable population most at risk of HIV infections.

Yet, very much like the NCCA and PCCA members, I am of the opinion that this is not the time for complacency but on the contrary, efforts should be doubled in order to strengthen some key elements of the HIV Response.

The 4 days open and frank discussions have led to a better understanding of priority areas and the need to always adjust the HIV response, such as:

- Maintain and sharpen the focus on most-at-risk-populations;
- Ensure the coverage, quality of and access to HIV and AIDS related services;
- Build the capacities of managers and implementers;
- Integrate care and support in health services and establish effective partnerships with civil society organizations;
- Strengthen the collection and use of strategic information;
- Secure the long-term sustainability of the response.

For the Joint UN Team on AIDS was to attend the 4 first days of the National AIDS Forum 2010 has been a unique opportunity to make provision of recommendations that will in turn will be integrated in the new UN Development Assistance Framework. The Joint UN Team will work with the NCCA and Secretariat to:

- Reduce sexual transmission of HIV in most at risk populations;
- Empower young people to protect themselves from HIV;
- Address Women, Girls, Gender equality and HIV;
- Protect drug users from becoming infected with HIV;
- Ensure that people living with HIV have access to comprehensive continuum of care service
- Improve strategic information generation, analysis and use.



- Bring HIV planning and action into national development policy and broader accountability frameworks;
- Broaden and strengthen engagement with communities, civil society and networks of people living with HIV at all levels of the response.

Let us all remember that low prevalence does not mean low priority and that by these continuous efforts, countless numbers of lives have been saved and this needs to continue. These actions led by everyone here today, will pave the way for the next 5 years and contribute to the country's efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.