

## **EXPERT MEETING ON HIV/AIDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ASIA-PACIFIC**

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A UN organised Expert Meeting on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights in Asia-Pacific was held in Bangkok on 23 – 24 March 2004. The need for the meeting was realised after the Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+) released a study documenting HIV related discrimination in four Asia-Pacific countries. This study indicated that, despite various laws and other statements about HIV and human rights, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in the region still face significant discrimination. A number of UN agencies, including the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, UNICEF and UNAIDS coordinated this meeting as a way of responding to this issue. The aims of the meeting included developing guidelines on HIV and human rights that are specific to countries in Asia and the Pacific Islands and to identify follow up initiatives or practical measures for responding to discrimination.

A single set of recommendations covering the entire Asia and Pacific Islands region was not developed at the meeting. Instead, working groups focussing on different regions identified issues and areas of action. The issues relating to HIV and human rights in the Pacific Islands region are not new. They include general lack of awareness about HIV, the difficulty of having HIV properly recognised as an important issue, particularly in countries where prevalence rates are low, and difficulties in using law to protect human rights, particularly in countries where state structures (such as the courts and police) do not function well or people do not use them.

Five priority areas of action on HIV and human rights in the Pacific Islands were identified:

1. Information gathering on social and epidemiological aspects of HIV so that we have a better understanding of the specific social factors that give rise to HIV vulnerability in the Pacific region and to inform prevention, testing, treatment and care planning and delivery.
2. Networking of PLWHA which takes into account the dispersed nature of populations and immense distances in the sub-region.
3. Involvement of PLWHA in planning and delivery of services, and resources for skills building of people living with HIV to support participation.
4. Provision of a very basic level of information about HIV to the community generally and policy makers in particular, covering issues such as means of transmission, testing and treatment ('AIDS 101').
5. Addressing the basic needs of PLWHA and their families to food, shelter, clean water and livelihood, as well as access to treatment.

In terms of follow up initiatives it was noted that official UN statements are not likely to be useful in the Pacific Islands. Official documents already exist at both the UN and Pacific Forum level but have not resulted in significant improvements in respecting the human rights of PLWHA or people suspected of being positive at the country or local level. New resources are required that translate official commitments into accessible, action oriented documents.

At the time of writing this report final recommendations from the Expert Meeting are being prepared. These synthesise the recommendations of each sub regional working group. Other information about the meeting, including background papers and documents can be found at [http://www.un.or.th/ohchr/issues/hivaids/ExperMeeting\\_2004/index.html](http://www.un.or.th/ohchr/issues/hivaids/ExperMeeting_2004/index.html)

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