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Fighting Against AIDS In APEC

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Submitted by: Thailand, China, the Philippines
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Fighting against AIDS in APEC

The world first heard about HIV/AIDS in 1980s, and since then, 6 million people in the Asia-Pacific region alone have become infected and about 1,500 people died of AIDS every day in the late 1990's.¹ However, since 2001, the Asia-Pacific region has had a success story in reducing the prevalence of HIV, given the strong political commitment combined with strong support from the relevant international organizations, such as UNAIDS, WHO and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, in exercising HIV intervention measures.

However, we cannot afford to be complacent, for although statistics show that the percentage of the adult population infected with HIV looks reassuringly low in Asia and the Pacific, more than 1 million people in the region became infected with HIV/AIDS in 2003. And more than 7 million people in the region are now estimated to have the virus and in 2003, half a million Asia-Pacific people died of it². It is, therefore, crucial that more work and effort should be explored and implemented to prevent future epidemic growth within and outside the APEC region.

AIDS is a threat to the global economy and society as a whole. A strong political commitment from APEC is a prerequisite to successfully tackling this deadly infectious disease. Building upon the 2001 APEC Economic Leaders' initiative on "Infectious Disease in the Asia Pacific Region: A Reason to Act and Acting with Reason" and the 2003 Health Security Initiative, APEC will take the following measures:

1. Send a strong message from Leaders declaring APEC's commitment to fight AIDS regionally and globally:

"We pledge our collective political commitment to combat the further spread of the AIDS pandemic. We commit our economies to work together at the regional and global levels. We support efforts to increase access to health care and safe and affordable drugs for all people living with AIDS."

2. Call for collective efforts from all stakeholders in government, medicine, business and media to reinforce domestic campaigns and initiate or support, existing international campaigns against AIDS.

¹ Report on HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific Region 2001 by World Health Organization

² UNAIDS 2004. Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic. Geneva: UNAIDS

3. Consider effective actions to address:

- Gender inequalities that drive the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Action should recognize both the essential contribution of women and girls and address their unique needs;

- Protection of high risk populations and vulnerable groups from HIV infection through sexual transmission, injection drug use, mother-to-child transmission, and blood transfusions and those affected by AIDS such as children.

4. Instruct Senior Officials to request that relevant APEC fora incorporate work on AIDS into their work programs, with the APEC Health Task Force coordinating the effort, in order to support, not duplicate, global and regional efforts to expand access to treatment and to sustain and strengthen prevention efforts, including those directed at youth. Under all circumstances, the AIDS work program within APEC should only complement and add value to the work undertaken by competent international and regional organizations.
