

**Statement by
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Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am grateful for this opportunity to present a brief overview of the AIDS challenge in Asia and the Pacific. The region is home to nearly 5 million people living with HIV, including 360,000 who became newly infected in 2009. No global effort to achieve the MDGs and Universal Access will succeed unless Asia and the Pacific is successful.

The good news is that most national epidemics appear to have stabilized and no country in the region has a generalized epidemic. Nevertheless, the next 4 years will be most critical for the regional efforts to achieve the MDGs by 2015, and urgent action is needed to accelerate progress.

Asia and the Pacific has proven that evidence-based programming – combined with appropriate allocation of resources towards those most impacted – is essential for a cost-effective response. Countries need to increase national ownership by funding their national HIV and AIDS response. In particular, they need to strengthen health systems and to integrate affected populations into social protection schemes.

Injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, and sex workers and their clients account for most of the new infections. Given the tremendous growth in recent decades, the Asia and Pacific region should be able to extend more adequate and effective services and programs to these key affected populations, particularly the poor and vulnerable. However, many countries are spending too little on public health systems and national AIDS programs, leaving key populations exposed to threats that could have been avoided.

Yet, Asia and the Pacific has the wealth and strength to meet the challenge.

The effects of HIV are not evenly distributed, and too often responses have not been tailored to those most in need. Bold leadership and political will are needed to effect change. Leaders have to devise policies and enact legislation that tackle social barriers, including discrimination and exclusion.

Governments need to provide better access to prevention and treatment services, and improve the quality of those services. But governments cannot do it alone; engagement of the private sector, civil society, communities and development partners is essential, as these stakeholders are critical players in the fight against AIDS.

Progress is also impeded by a lack of basic data, which inhibits an effective response and threatens to leave key affected populations without proper services. The Commission on AIDS in Asia emphasized the importance of prioritizing existing resources for low cost and high impact interventions – with the aim of averting new infections. By reducing inefficiencies in national and regional responses, and prioritizing high impact interventions, the region will be in a much better position to reach regional targets.

Men who buy sex constitute the largest infected population group in Asia and the Pacific. Most of these men either are married or will get married. This puts a significant number of women, often perceived as “low-risk” because they only have sex with their husbands, at great risk of acquiring HIV. Evidence also indicates that there is a strong link between gender-based violence and the spread of HIV. Eliminating gender inequalities and increasing the capacity of women and girls to protect themselves from the risk of HIV infection must become a higher priority.

Expansion of regional cooperation and South-South cooperation can help to address the needs of mobile and migrating populations, generate evidence-based good practices, and stimulate technology development. Such cooperation can also bridge gaps in resources and capacities, and should be pursued in partnership with regional economic and political organizations.

The response to AIDS is a shared responsibility. As the regional development bank for Asia and the Pacific, ADB is committed to working closely with our developing member countries and partners to support prevention initiatives that are cost-effective and based on evidence. We believe that this is a winning strategy for achieving the MDG and Universal Access targets.

Thank you for your attention.