

## **Putting young people to the fore of the AIDS response** *Government Launches Campaign on Children and AIDS*

**BEIJING, 10 September, 2006** - China's Vice-Minister of Health Huang Jiefu officially launched the Campaign on Children and AIDS on behalf of the State Council AIDS Working Committee Office (SCAWCO). Vice-Minister Huang pledged the Government's enhanced commitment to putting a broad alliance of children and young people to the fore of the national AIDS response.

"AIDS affects adolescents and young adults disproportionately. Just as in the rest of the world, China is finally listening to the message that we must act now or pay later. We must do it at the right scale, and do it effectively," stated Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of Joint UN Programme

### HIV/AIDS Affects Children and Young People Severely and in Many Ways

"Don't let us face the threat of AIDS at birth"; "don't let AIDS take away our mother and father, our family and our childhood"; "don't let HIV/AIDS rob us of our youth, our dreams and our future!" These were some of the voices of children and young people heard at the event which attended also by children affected by AIDS and AIDS youth ambassadors.

Their impassioned words were directed at the representatives from the government, NGOs, and the private sector together at today's launch..

China's 650,000 people living with AIDS, most in their young adulthood, indeed brings the number of children affected to many more than 76,000, the 2002 estimate of children in China who have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Despite escalating investment in the national AIDS response, the full impact of AIDS on children and young people needs to be addressed as they are forced to bear witness to the needless suffering and death of their parents, contract the virus from HIV positive mothers, go without their life-saving drugs, or are deprived of their entitlement to education and social services because of poverty, stigma and social discrimination.

Despite the fact that half of all new infections are among young people, alarming statistics show that young people lack the knowledge and skills to protect themselves. Stigma and discrimination, while adding to the suffering of the inflicted also prevent young people from learning about AIDS and about self-protection.

### Chinese Government Advocates Broad Alliance for Children and AIDS

To address the complexity and magnitude of the impact of AIDS on children and young people, SCAWCO has mobilized a wide diversity of partners, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Youth League, the All China Women's Federation, and the China National Committee for the Care of Children.

Working with other sectors of society and with young people and children, the aim is to work together to achieve the goals related to children and young people outlined in China's national plans and international commitments. Each partner organization will take on specific responsibilities and accountabilities in the areas of prevention of mother to child transmission, pediatric care and treatment, care and support of children affected by AIDS, and prevention among young people through their participation and commitment to stigma reduction.

The Government has already appointed AIDS Ambassadors and youth representatives who have all pledged their support to the Campaign by learning the facts on AIDS, sharing knowledge and experience with friends and family, and caring for children affected by AIDS. "Critical to China's success to halt the spread of HIV will be the government's leadership on prevention and young people's commitment to be "a force for change'," stated Wing-Sie Cheng, UNICEF HIV/AIDS Regional Advisor for East Asia and the Pacific.

Mr. Khalid Malik, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Representative, committed to support the Campaign through the new Joint Programme on behalf of the UN family.

The Campaign in China has been launched in response to the call of the Global Campaign on Children and AIDS, launched last year at the UN Headquarters in New York by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, together with UNICEF and other UN partners.