

## Renew resolve to end AIDS: WHO on World Aids Day

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Close to 16 million people are now receiving antiretroviral treatment. In WHO South-East Asia Region, new infections declined by 32% between 2000 and 2014. Almost 1.3 million people are on antiretroviral treatment (ART).

"However, gaps remain. More than half of the people with HIV are unaware of their status. Those who test, do so late when they have symptoms and their immune systems are already compromised. Only 36% of the people living with HIV in the Region are on treatment; and fewer than 30% of people with HIV are able to get to the last point when HIV virus multiplication in their body is suppressed which is essential to prevent further transmission," said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia Region.

The new Sustainable Development Agenda includes the target of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 - by reducing the number of new infections by an additional 25% by 2020; ensuring that 90% of people living with HIV are aware of their infection and 90% of them are on ART, and 90% of those on ART have no detectable virus in their blood.

"Bold actions will be required to achieve the target for ending AIDS by 2030," said Dr Poonam, "with the health sector playing a central role. Countries need to prioritize HIV interventions to get the highest impact. This includes using newer approaches for testing like community based HIV testing, ensuring that all HIV positive people are started on treatment and those identified negative, especially who are at risk have access to HIV prevention and re-testing services."

According to her, the new targets are ambitious but achievable.

She added, "By the end of 2014, Thailand had tested and enrolled more than 60% of its people living with HIV into treatment. It is one of ten countries in the world to have achieved this distinction. Many other countries in the Region can and must accelerate and scale up HIV testing and treatment programmes."

"Efforts over the next five years will decide whether we will end AIDS by 2030 or face resurgence. In over four decades of the epidemic, science, social mobilization, political commitment and coordinated response among key stakeholders have made it possible to end AIDS. History shall not be kind to us if we become complacent now."

She pointed that ending AIDS will require investments, but will be worthwhile.

"Countries in the Region are leading the way in funding HIV response through domestic budgets, but more remains to be done. We need to ensure that HIV response is firmly positioned in the development and health agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals. We need to ensure that community responses are not only sustained, but further scaled up and fully funded. Stigma, discrimination and punitive laws still hamper access to key services for those most in need. We need to reaffirm and renew our resolve to work towards realizing our goal of ending AIDS in the WHO South-East Asia Region by 2030," she opined.