



PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR GLOBAL ACTION (PGA)

PRESS RELEASE

IN MIDST OF ACUTE HEALTH CRISIS OF THE ASIAN TSUNAMI

PARLIAMENTARIANS MEET TO DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING REGIONS' HEALTH SYSTEMS

*Islamabad, Pakistan/New York, NY, USA
January 6, 2005*

On 14–15th January 2005 Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), a worldwide network of individual parliamentarians, and the National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan will hold *Sub-regional Parliamentary Seminar on HIV/AIDS and Health Policy in South Asia*. The seminar, hosted by PGA members **Dr. Noor Jehan Panezai**, MP and **Mr. Naveed Qamar**, MP will be held at the Serena-Islamabad Hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan in collaboration with the *World Health Organisation (WHO), UNAIDS, UNFPA, Aga Khan University (AKU), UN Foundation, and the Swiss, British, Canadian, and Australian Governments*. MPs will learn about the nature and extent of the virus in the region and analyze effective prevention, care and treatment initiatives, including improving the region's health care system

The Seminar is targeting the region at a crucial moment as the vulnerability to the disease is made all the more apparent with the aftermath of a devastating tsunami. As reported by the UNAIDS, unless effective action is taken urgently to tackle the HIV/AIDS crisis in the region, more people will be infected in Asia than in Africa by 2010. The number of people living with HIV in South and South-East Asia now totals 7.1 million.

However, a window of opportunity still exists for governments to act now to curtail the spread of HIV in South Asia. Following the examples of Cambodia and Thailand, which have mounted large-scale prevention programmes addressing sexual transmission of HIV, parliamentarians can make a real difference in curtailing the pandemic. *“Unless parliamentarians take action to prevent the further spread of HIV, adopt legislation to confront stigma and discrimination, and support programmes to make anti-retroviral drugs affordable and accessible, South Asia will become the new epicenter of the virus,”* said **Dr. Panezai**. *“Legislators can ensure that improved reproductive health infrastructure and personnel gets utilised for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS,”* noted **Mr. Tony Worthington**, MP (UK). **Dr. Vallabhbhai Kathiria** (India), Former Minister of State for Health & Family Welfare, added, *“Controlling HIV/AIDS is a great challenge to public representatives and it is the great responsibility of parliamentarians to sensitize people regarding reproductive health, women's empowerment, population, and development for better work tomorrow.”*

In all, some 60 parliamentarians will attend the conference, including high-ranking MPs and Ministers from **Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka**, including **Hon. Chaudhry Amir Hussain**, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, **Hon. Mohammedmian Soomro**, Chairman of Senate of Pakistan, **Hon. Muhammad Nasir Khan**, Federal Minister of Health (Pakistan) and **Hon Shaukat Aziz**, Prime Minister of Pakistan. Members of Parliaments from other regions across the world, including MPs from the countries of **Brazil, Canada, Denmark, Ghana, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Thailand, Uganda**, and the **United Kingdom** will also take part in the event to share successful HIV/AIDS health policies. Internationally renowned health experts **Dr. Nafis Sadik**, Special Representative for the UN Secretary-General for HIV/AIDS in South Asia, as well as prominent representatives of civil society will address the conference.

Note to editors:

Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) is a unique network of 1,350 MPs from 111 parliaments, engaged in a range of action-oriented initiatives that promote democracy, peace, justice and development throughout the world. Using its worldwide network of parliamentarians who serve as bridges between their local constituencies, national governments and the international community, PGA is experienced in fostering policy dialogue among a wide cross-section of actors to address complex social problems that evade local solutions.

For more information please contact:

Ms. Anna Gekht, Programme Officer, PGA,

Tel. 1.212.687.7755 x102, Fax 1.212.687.8409, Email: anna.gekht@pgaction.org