



PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR GLOBAL ACTION

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Who: Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)
What: Second Sub-Regional Parliamentary Seminar on HIV/AIDS in South Asia
Where: Dhaka, Bangladesh (Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel)
When: January 26-27, 2006

PARLIAMENTARIANS CROSS POLITICAL PARTY LINES TO ADDRESS HIV & AIDS

DHAKA, BANGLADESH; January 25, 2006 – On January 26-27, 2006 **Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA)**, a worldwide network of over 1300 individual, multi-party legislators from more than 110 countries, will host the ***Second Sub-Regional Parliamentary Seminar on HIV/AIDS in South Asia*** in Dhaka, Bangladesh at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel. **H.E. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia**, Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and **Hon. Begum Sheikh Hasina, MP, Leader of the Opposition - Awami League**, have both pledged their support of the conference, citing the need to raise awareness of the deadly virus.

Honourable Bangladeshi MPs from multiple political parties are joining together to discuss how they can improve policies to halt the spread of HIV. Their united commitment to work together is a hopeful sign for improving the lives of people living with HIV & AIDS and increasing prevention efforts at all levels. This parliamentary seminar on HIV & AIDS in a low prevalence country like Bangladesh demonstrates the highest level of commitment of the government and the lawmakers to put the issue high in the agenda, above partisan politics. PGA members **Barrister Ziaur Rahman Khan, MP (BNP)**, **Mr. Abdus Shahid, MP (AL)** - Chief Whip of the Opposition, and **Mr. Zahir Uddin Swapon, MP (BNP)** have taken the lead to coordinate the conference. Their efforts reinforce the work of MPs who are members of the Bangladesh Parliament Members' Support Group on the Prevention of HIV/AIDS and Human Trafficking.

International legislators and experts from other countries in the South Asia sub-region and beyond, representing **13 countries** will attend the conference, including those from **Cambodia, Canada, India, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand and Uganda**. Ministers, Deputy Speakers, Chairs and Members of Health and HIV standing committees will take part in the discussions. In addition, development specialists from the UN and International Agencies, representatives of international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other members of civil society will join the MPs, comprising approximately 100 total participants. Participants will discuss the best practices for preventing HIV/AIDS, the need to reduce stigma surrounding the virus, and next steps for improving the care and treatment of people living with HIV. There will be four working sessions on 1) HIV in South Asia, 2) Political Commitment, 3) Care and Treatment, and 4) Resource Mobilization. The seminar will re-assess the commitments made by legislators in the *Islamabad Declaration of Action*, the outcome document of PGA's January 2005 *Sub-Regional Parliamentary Seminar on HIV/AIDS in South Asia*. Parliamentary participants will agree upon a Declaration of Action for strengthening both country-level and regional level responses to stopping the spread of HIV.

The Inaugural Ceremony on Day 1, Jan. 26th, will feature a statement by Chief Guest, **H.E. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia**, Honourable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, a Keynote Address by internationally renowned health expert, **Dr. Nafis Sadik**, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific, and remarks by **Hon. (Dr.) Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, MP (Bangladesh)**, Hon. Minister for Health and Family Welfare. **Hon. Md. Abdul Hamid, Advocate, MP** – Deputy Leader of the Opposition will present a closing statement at the final session on Day 2, Jan. 27th.

The number of people living with the HIV has reached its highest level in history with 40.3 million infections globally. This is double the number of infections ten years ago. In 2005, some 8.3 million people were living with HIV in Asia

and the Pacific, including 1.1 million people who became newly infected in the past year. These staggering numbers signify that greater political leadership of legislators is even more vital at the community, national, and international levels. In Bangladesh, the HIV prevalence is below 1 percent in high risk groups, however the country is still vulnerable to an HIV/AIDS epidemic due to the prevalence of behaviour patterns and risk factors that facilitate the rapid spread of the virus as well as its large population. Recently, the Government of Bangladesh has approved the National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS for 2004-2010 under the guidance of the **National AIDS Committee (NAC)**, of which **H.E. President Prof. Iajuddin Ahmed is Chief Patron**, and with various stakeholders. Efforts to fully operationalize NAC are currently underway.

Conference supporters include *ActionAid International, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Government of Norway, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the World Health Organisation (WHO).*

Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA) is a unique network of over 1,300 MPs from 114 parliaments, engaged in a range of action-oriented initiatives that promote democracy, peace, justice and development throughout the world. PGA members are involved in efforts to increase parliamentarians' support of HIV prevention, care, and treatment programmes that are comprehensive, evidence-based, and gender-specific. PGA's work on HIV/AIDS in South Asia began in 2005 in Islamabad, Pakistan, when it hosted the "Sub-Regional Parliamentary Seminar on HIV/AIDS in South Asia" with the National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan.