

**Ministry of Public Health, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
& World Health Organization
Joint Press Release**

**For the commemoration of World Aids Day
“Zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths”**

**H.E Dr. Suraya Dalil, A/Minister of Public Health, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
And
Dr Ahmed Shadoul, World Health Organization Representative,**

Kabul 3 December 2011 – Observation ceremony of World AIDS Day at the Ministry of Public Health, Dr. Suraya Dalil, Acting Minister of Public Health (MoPH) of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, with WHO stressed the importance of ending HIV infections, discrimination and AIDS-related deaths.

The number of people living with HIV is reported at 1250 persons at the Ministry of Public Health, while UNAIDS and WHO estimates between 2000 to 3000 people living with HIV in Afghanistan. The fastest methods of spreading HIV and AIDS is through HIV infected needles and syringes shared by drug users. Recent data shows a 7.1% of HIV/AIDS prevalence rate across three urban centers for injecting drug users. Over 85 per cent of injecting drug users interviewed in a 2010 joint survey (Government of Afghanistan and UNODC) said that they had shared needles.

H.E Dr. Suraya Dalil stated in her speech that “the HIV prevalence in Afghanistan is low in the general population; however, it shouldn’t divert our attention from addressing this critical problem. There are numerous determinants which can fuel the spread of HIV in our country including, three decades of war, poverty, low literacy rate, immigrations, internal displacements; the use of narcotics; unsafe injections etc. UN experts warn that if not addressed, underlying issues of drug use – such as low awareness of the spread of HIV, inaccessibility to harm reduction service (OST), stigmatization and discrimination of people with HIV/AIDS – will cause the HIV and AIDS rate in the country to magnify.

WHO calls for an end of discrimination through public outreach and education, especially to the healthcare services community to set clear standards that discrimination is not acceptable part of quality healthcare and not part of Afghanistan’s generous culture.

By end of November 2011, Kabul and Herat Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) centers have registered a total of 228 HIV+ patients. Through these centers, 108 HIV+ receive ART in Afghanistan. The National AIDS Control Program provides services through 16 Voluntary Counseling and Testing Centers (VCTs), 28 Drop-in-Centers and in 8 provinces namely Kabul, Herat, Jalalabad, Balkh, Badakhshan, Kandahar, Ghazni and Kunduz and 2 Anti-Retroviral-Therapy (ART) centers in Kabul and Herat.

WHO calls on MoPH, to link the HIV/AIDS/STI program to the main health and development plans, for a more comprehensive package of HIV prevention services, awareness and HIV /AIDS treatment services harm reduction services, for HIV/AIDS and focus on the pervasiveness of needle sharing in drug user communities.

MoPH must build on the political commitments, investments, energy, activism and determination that can make zero new infection of HIV, zero discrimination and zero related AIDS-deaths a reality for all Afghans. Financing will be critical to success.

We have a clear vision: an educated family, especially with educated women and girls, maintain a healthy family and this is the foundation of a peaceful, progressive, and proud Afghanistan.

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