



## **Final Report**

On 03-05 May 2008, the second regional Eastern Europe and Central Asia AIDS Conference was held in Moscow. Over 2 000 participants from all countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Eastern Europe, Central Asia and many other countries attended the event. The conference created greater opportunities for the participation of researchers.

The conference provided political and community leaders, scientists and researchers, health professionals, people living with HIV and civil society representatives the opportunity to discuss critical issues related to the spread of HIV infection in the region.

The discussions that took place during the conference demonstrated the need to understand the character and the regional features of the epidemic, as well as universal commitment to the principles as outlined in the Declaration of the Special Session on HIV/AIDS of the United Nations General Assembly. They confirmed the participants' pledge to achieve important indicators such as the goal of Universal Access to prevention, treatment and care for HIV infection, the Millennium Development Goals, the goals outlined in the Urgent Response to the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the G8 statement on the struggle against infectious diseases adopted in St. Petersburg.

Conference participants pointed out the key features of the epidemic in the region, such as transmission through injecting drug use, the prevalence of HIV-associated coinfection with tuberculosis and viral hepatitis, as well as the rapid increase in the number of people needing ARV treatment. Conference participants welcomed the positive tendencies and renewed opportunities for the region's fight against HIV, including the increased funding, political support commitment, strengthened role of civil society organizations and active involvement of the communities affected by the epidemic.

Advances in the development of national and regional initiatives to support HIV/AIDS research were pointed out.

Yet, much effort needs to be made to implement comprehensive approaches to improving the quality of life of people living with HIV, which includes such components as access to reproductive and sexual health services, family planning, adoption, social and psychological support and employment.

The Conference again demonstrated that the fight against HIV/AIDS is a new long-term challenge and often addresses a number of sensitive issues. For example, while it can be well-grounded from the epidemiological and humanitarian points of view, the implementation of certain activities in some countries of the region can come into conflict with national legislation or arouse aversion among certain parts of society. Although HIV/AIDS is a complex social problem, multisectorial interaction and the involvement of educators, mass media and other key players in the struggle against the epidemic remain insufficient.

Discussions held during the conference highlighted issues of serious concern among the majority of

participants regarding the following key regional trends:

- HIV prevention programs are not keeping pace with realistic needs, particularly those of vulnerable population groups, such as injection drug users, sex workers, men who have sex with men. Illegal migration is a new phenomenon requiring attention with respect to access to health services, including HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment;
- Levels of stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and other vulnerable groups remain unacceptably high;
- Treating people in prisons is a big problem in countries expanding access to ARV;
- Concerns are raised over the spread in the region of a number of initiatives promoting ways to treat HIV/AIDS that are not supported by scientific evidence or are plainly pseudoscience;
- While ARV treatment coverage in the region is rapidly growing, programs aimed at support and case management of people on treatment, including adherence programs, should be intensified;
- A common feature in a number of countries is the imperfection of ARV purchasing procedures;
- Given the importance of injection drug use in the region, access to comprehensive drug treatment of high quality remains unacceptably low;
- Public health care services and general medical institutions are not fully involved in programs for people living with HIV;
- The response to the growing problem of HIV-associated illnesses, particularly TB and hepatitis B and C, is inadequate;
- The growing number of children vulnerable to infection through mother-to-child transmission is a priority that requires immediate action;
- HIV prevalence in the vulnerable group of men who have sex with men has not been assessed;
- A feature common to all the countries in the region is the insufficient level of civil society involvement in the decision-making process and the implementation of principles of Greater Involvement of People living with AIDS. Further efforts to develop civil society institutes in the response to HIV/AIDS are required;
- Economic growth in many countries of the region leads to the reduction of external financing, however there are no clear prospects for the continuation of key activities to fight HIV/AIDS after the international projects. The lack of clear prospects for maintenance of key HIV/AIDS programs in large countries of the region after the end of Global Fund grants;

The conference demonstrated that the collaboration between governmental institutions, representatives of civil society, organizations of people living with HIV, faith-based organizations, media, members of the private sector, and all other key stakeholders, is absolutely essential for an effective response to the epidemic in countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia.