

Advocacy Guide to the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Statement on HIV/AIDS

*Asia Pacific Ministerial Meeting
October 2001
Melbourne, Australia*

This document was based on the International Council of AIDS Service Organization's (ICASO) "Advocacy Guide to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS".

It is sponsored by the AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific (ASAP), the Asia Pacific Council of AIDS Service Organisations (APCASO) and the Asian Pacific Network of PLWHAs (APN+).

It was adapted from the ICASO Advocacy Guide by the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) and the National Association of People living with HIV/AIDS (NAPWA Australia).

Introduction

Ministers from countries of the Asia-Pacific region met in Melbourne on 9 October 2001 at the invitation of the Honourable Alexander Downer, MP, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia aiming

- To consider the significant challenges the HIV/AIDS epidemic poses to countries of the Asia-Pacific region
- To identify ways to strengthen partnerships to combat the continued spread of HIV/AIDS

The meeting was held to capitalise on both the planned Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Brisbane and the 6th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP), which was attended by over 3,500 AIDS workers, PLWHAs, lawmakers, health professionals and other delegates.

Another reason for the meeting was to build on the energy created by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS held in June 2001. This was the most visible of a number of important international and regional meetings that highlighted the global crisis with greater urgency than ever before. Australia played a particularly active role in UNGASS,

with a delegation that included NGO/CBO and PLWHA representation¹, and the widely-acknowledged key role of Ambassador Penny Wensley as co-chair. The Australian-based Ministerial Meeting followed on this active role.

33 countries were represented at the meeting, with 26 countries having at least one Minister present. Overall, 33 Ministers attended. Representatives from 12 international agencies and organisations also attended. In the words of AusAID: "It was a unique opportunity for Ministers to discuss effective responses to HIV/AIDS in the region and to demonstrate broad political commitment to counter the escalating HIV/AIDS epidemic nationally and regionally. The successful meeting concluded with Ministers agreeing on a Ministerial Statement."

In the Ministerial Statement, the Ministers recognise the scope of HIV/AIDS and the necessity for action; they recognise precedents for the statement and a set of key principles for HIV/AIDS in the region; and they make a set of 13 specific commitments for action.

These are the countries represented at the Ministerial Meeting:

Australia	Japan	New Caledonia	Solomon Islands
Bangladesh	Kiribati	New Zealand	Thailand
Bhutan	Lao PDR	Niue	Tonga
Cambodia	Malaysia	Pakistan	Tuvalu
China	Marshall Islands	Palau	Vanuatu
Cook Islands	Mongolia	Papua New Guinea	Vietnam
East Timor	Myanmar	Philippines	
India	Nauru	Republic of Korea	
Indonesia	Nepal	Samoa	

If your country is on this list, we hope that this guide will be of some use to you.

Importance of the Ministerial Statement

The Ministerial Statement is not binding, but does express the commitment of the governments represented to step up domestic responses to the epidemic. While it does not have the same force as a treaty or convention that has been formally ratified by individual member states, it is a statement of intent that has been signed by governments, as represented by key ministers.

It is an important document as it recognises the severity of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the region, outlines a set of sound key principles for HIV/AIDS and makes concrete commitments. Further, it builds upon precedents such as the Declaration of Commitment adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in June 2001. The International Council of AIDS Service Organisations (ICASO) has produced an advocacy guide to the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, and encourages civil society to use the Declaration to increase the commitment of their governments to HIV/AIDS work and to improve the quality of this work. Similarly, the Ministerial Statement, a document which is specific to the Asia-Pacific region, can be used to lobby national and local governments for a better and stronger response to HIV/AIDS. In fact, effective lobbying might use a combination of references to both the Declaration of Commitment and the Ministerial Statement. The UNGASS Declaration can be found at: www.unaids.org/UNGASS/index.html

¹ This document will use the acronyms NGO (non-governmental organisation), CBO (community-based organisation), and PLWHA (people living with HIV/AIDS).

How to Use the Ministerial Statement to Enhance the Response to HIV/AIDS

The aim of this guide is to provide suggestions for advocacy for improving national responses to HIV/AIDS. We recognise that each national situation will be different and that strategies should be adopted and modified as suitable. We would also welcome your advice on how this guide would be made most appropriate for your country or for the Asia-Pacific region as whole. This document is based on a some key principles which should be stated:

- We believe that governments and NGOs/CBOs should strive to work together in positive collaboration.
- We believe that CBOs that represent affected communities have a crucial role to play in the response to HIV/AIDS
- We support the GIPA principle, the Greater Involvement of People living with HIV/AIDS.

We believe that the Ministerial Statement provides an opportunity for CBOs and NGOs including those working in HIV/AIDS care, treatment and prevention, advocacy, and representing PLWHA to engage with our respective governments to translate their commitment as expressed in the Ministerial Statement into action.

The following section contains recommended strategies that can be pursued at the national level. Not all CBOs and NGOs will be able to pursue all of the strategies listed here. CBOs and NGOs should select strategies that work for them.

1. Disseminate the Ministerial Statement widely to organisations and people working in HIV/AIDS.

If your government has endorsed the Ministerial Statement, they have promised to follow through a series of commitments. We need to disseminate the Statement to relevant organisations and individuals in the region to raise awareness of what these commitments are. The following is a partial list of who should receive copies of the Ministerial Statement

- CBOs and NGOs
- Human rights and development organisations
- Health care professionals, researchers, academics
- Politicians and government officials
- Media

2. Disseminate this Advocacy Guide widely to organisations and people working in HIV/AIDS

We hope that this guide will be a tool to help CBOs and NGOs to use the Ministerial Statement wisely.

3. Analyse the Ministerial Statement and Establish Priorities

The Ministerial Statement outlines four precedents for the Statement, acknowledges ten principles or actions, and makes thirteen key commitments.

Depending on what your lobbying and advocacy priorities are, you can focus on the relevant parts of the Statement. For example, one of the commitments is to:

Encourage the further development of multi-sectoral, national plans of action and sub-regional and regional initiatives to address HIV/AIDS

If you feel the need to lobby your governments to develop a stronger national plan of action, or that their plan is not sufficiently multi-sectoral, they can be reminded of the commitment that they have made by signing this document.

4. Hold your government accountable for following through on the commitments it made in the Ministerial Statement.

The commitments made by your government in the Ministerial Statement are tools that you can use to encourage and/or pressure your government to do more to respond to the epidemic. Here are some suggested actions:

- Develop and implement lobby and advocacy plans. For example, you could:
 - Ask your government how it plans to implement the commitments that it made in the Ministerial Statement. Tell your government what you think the priority commitments are. Call for the development of a specific action plan with timelines and an appropriate budget.
 - Press your government to review and modify its National AIDS Strategy or other plans to reflect commitments in the Ministerial Statement.
 - Ask your government how it plans to monitor the implementation of the commitments in the Statement.
 - Lobby your government to allocate more resources to the response to HIV/AIDS
 - Press your government to develop strategies to better mobilise and coordinate international assistance
 - Lobby your government to allocate the bulk of any new funding to work being done by community-based organisations
 - Encourage your government to undertake an assessment of the capacity of national institutions to lead a large-scale and multi-sectoral response to the epidemic
- Organise meetings with other HIV/AIDS CBOs and NGOs in your country to develop a common approach for your lobby and advocacy effort and to exchange information about your respective lobby and advocacy activities.

As you are developing your lobby and advocacy plan, you will need to take into account factors such as:

- Whether your government has a good track record in responding to HIV/AIDS
- What the nature of the epidemic is in your country
- What resources are available to your government and organisation
- Whether there is a history of government-community collaboration in your country and whether your government is receptive to working with NGOs and CBOs
- Who the key people are in your government whom you should be approaching.

In some cases, it may be important to first hold a meeting with government officials to let them know that the NGO community is willing and ready to work with them to implement the Ministerial Statement. In cases where you have a good working relationship already, you can begin to develop and implement a more articulated lobby and advocacy plan with your own targets for moving the agenda forward.

5. Lobby to be part of the process.

In addition to calling on your government to follow through on the commitments in the Ministerial Statement, you should request and/or insist that NGOs be involved in the development of any action plans. This process might take place in high-level reviews, senate committees or other forums – and you should seek to be included in these.

The Ministerial Statement commits to

- Encourage the strengthening of national and regional partnerships incorporating governments [and] community groups (particularly of the most vulnerable groups)...
- Seek to actively engage with people living with, or at risk of being infected by HIV/AIDS...

Both of these commitments support the collaboration between government, NGOs, CBOs and PLWHA groups in a response to HIV/AIDS.

6. Develop and strengthen partnerships with organisations and individuals outside the HIV/AIDS NGO community.

It has been recognised that a government response to HIV/AIDS must be whole-of-government or “multisectoral” and move beyond only involving ministries and departments of health. In the same way, a successful response to HIV requires that a national response involve not only NGOs and CBOs that work on HIV/AIDS, but also organisations that focus on issues of human rights, development, health, labour, law, industry and social action.

The Ministerial Statement encourages partnerships and action from a variety of players while the UNGASS Declaration recognises the importance of “strong partnerships involving Governments, the United Nations system, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, the business sector, community and faith-based organisations.”

Approach other NGOs and CBOs and discuss with them how you can work together to see that the commitments made in the Ministerial Statement are fulfilled. Build coalitions.

7. Strengthen the working relationship with your government.

Wherever possible, develop better partnerships with your government. NGOs and CBOs throughout the world all have different relationships – sometimes cooperative and sometimes not. Determine what works best within the context of your political process and aim to improve the relationship if possible. Remind them, if necessary, that you are there to assist them to implement programs and policies that can help them fulfil their commitments.

8. *Develop strategies to monitor implementation of the commitments made in the Ministerial Statement (and other documents such as the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment) in your country.*

Civil society needs to monitor the implementation of commitments made in the Ministerial Statement and other key documents such as the UNGASS Declaration of Commitment and the 1994 Paris AIDS Summit Declaration which first enshrined the principle of Greater Involvement of PLWH/A (GIPA). This is a significant task. Discuss with your NGOs and CBOs in your country how best to do this. You may decide that you need to obtain additional resources to make this happen.

Next Steps

In addition to the many national commitments made by signing the Ministerial Statement, ministers also agreed to

- Develop an Asia-Pacific Leadership Forum on HIV/AIDS with establishment support from Australia.

There have been no indications of when this forum will take place, but when the date is known, it may be an ideal time period by which to monitor commitments made and results achieved. The forum could be used as an opportunity to present your government's "report card" on HIV/AIDS. It might also be useful to organise well ahead of the forum to make a gather a concerted national and regional response from CBOs and NGOs as to what are the priority points to lobby for during the forum.

A successful advocacy campaign requires careful and thorough planning that includes:

- Selecting the issue or problem you want to address
- Analysing and researching the issue or problem
- Developing specific objectives for the advocacy campaign
- Identifying targets
- Identifying resources
- Identifying strategies
- Identifying key contacts and allies
- Creating an action plan
- Implementing, monitoring and evaluation

It may also be useful to determine the reasons that your target of advocacy should agree with you. For example, for a plan to increase access to treatment, what is the benefit for your government to expand provision of ARV drugs to PLWHA?

It is highly recommended that you read "Framework for an Advocacy Campaign" found in the ICASO document, "An Advocate's Guide to the International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights." You can find this PDF file at:

<http://www.icaso.org/docs/AdvocatesGuide-English.pdf>

You may also need to identify funding for the project. The "Proposal Writing Guidelines" from the NAPWA may assist you with this. This will eventually be available at:

<http://www.napwa.org.au/index.html>

Or please e-mail John Rock at the address below to receive by e-mail the latest version. A printed version is being planned.

Finally, if you have comments for us to improve this document, or have enquiries, we can try to answer them. Please note that none of the organisations listed here are funding agencies, although we do our best to support CBOs and NGOs in the Asia-Pacific region with information and referrals.

Andy Quan, International Policy Officer, Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations
aquan@afao.org.au

John Rock, International Spokesperson, National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS, Australia
johnrock@bigfoot.com

Dennis Altman, President, AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific (ASAP),
d.altman@latrobe.edu.au

Susan Chong, APCASO Secretariat, Asia-Pacific Council of AIDS Service Organisations (APCASO)
apcaso@pd.jaring.my

Brenton Wong, APN+ Secretariat, Asia-Pacific Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (APN+)
apn@pacific.net.sg