

Vilnius, 17 September 2004

HIV/AIDS - European Union and neighbouring countries pledge common action to counter resurgent epidemic

Health ministers, AIDS experts, industry and civil society representatives from across the EU and its eastern neighbours are meeting today in Vilnius to pledge action to counter a growing HIV/AIDS epidemic. The Vilnius conference will adopt a declaration committing participants to a coordinated continent-wide effort to fight the disease with all involved working together in partnership. A package of measures set out in a paper presented by the European Commission (see [IP/04/1076](#)) will be endorsed as a key element of this effort. Commissioner Pavel Telička, who opened the conference with Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, hailed the declaration as a crucial first step. “The challenge now is to turn the political commitments into concrete action over the next eighteen months” said Mr. Telička. The proportion of newly reported HIV cases has doubled in Western Europe since 1995. In certain of the countries that joined the EU on 1 May and in the EU’s eastern neighbours the rates of new infections are the highest in the world.

After meeting AIDS patients and NGO representatives, Commissioner Pavel Telička said “The message from this Ministerial meeting is clear. The European continent has to wake up again to the renewed threat it faces. A number of Governments are simply not doing enough and have to make this a key political priority. What we now need are clear national strategies that include best practices and ensure that all actors have a role to play”.

Partnership and coordination in fighting HIV/AIDS

The declaration to be adopted in Vilnius lays out a road map for fighting HIV/AIDS in Europe and its neighbourhood. Commitments approved include:

- Development of coherent, comprehensive – and properly funded – national strategies for HIV/AIDS prevention
- Involvement of civil society in reviewing the progress achieved by these strategies
- Effective HIV/AIDS prevention measures such as promoting the use of condoms and harm reduction programmes for intravenous drug users
- Ensuring universal access to affordable treatment
- Combating social exclusion and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS

- Cooperation and coordination between the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, (UNAIDS) and the European Union in providing technical and financial support to governments and other partners
- Cooperation in identifying best practice and gathering data
- Research into more effective prevention and new treatments for HIV/AIDS

Further information

For further information about EU policies and initiatives on HIV/AIDS see:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/ph_threats/com/aids/aids_en.htm