

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World's First Asia Pacific Transgender Network Launched to Champion Health and Rights of Transgender Women in the Region

–Diverse groups from warias, kathoeyes and hijras to be represented

23 December 09, Bangkok, Thailand. Transgender women from 10 Asia Pacific countries and areas are coming together to say “No!” to discrimination and marginalisation by forming the world's first Asia Pacific Transgender Network (APTN). After three days of intense meetings, it was decided that the APTN, composed entirely of transgender women across the region, will champion transgender women's health, legal and social rights.

Ms. Khartini Slamah, Founding Working Group member and Core-Group Chair of the Transgender Programme in Pink Triangle (PT) Foundation, Malaysia, says this represents a milestone in the history of transgender women in the region. She says, “For a long time transgender women have been represented among the MSM (men who have sex with men) sub-population group, but there is now a recognition that we are a distinct demographic with our own unique needs. We wish to be separated from the MSM umbrella and inform The United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to stop clustering us under the MSM umbrella. Transgender women are not men – we have different issues and needs. Thus we have formed a network addressing the needs of transgender women only.”

From *hijras* in South Asia to *warias* in Indonesia

The group represents a broad spectrum of transgender women from sex workers to career women, from *hijras* (South Asia), *warias* (Indonesia), *kathoeyes* (Thailand) and *sao praphet songs* (Thailand) to specialised interest groups such as youth, Muslims and elderly transgender women.

Ms Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, another Founding Working Group member and one of the most recognisable faces of hijras in India, says she is pleased the community is being represented by the network. She says, “For the first time in history, hijras from Nepal, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh are joining hands with our transgender sisters from Asia Pacific to say 'No!' to being treated like second-class citizens. We know there is strength in numbers. Together, we can advance and improve the health, legal and social rights of transgender women.”

The network will also tackle issues in the region such as HIV prevalence among transgender sex workers, especially in countries such as Indonesia and Cambodia, where infection rates are extremely high and resources in place are inadequate to ensure access to quality healthcare, as well as to protect the rights of the sex workers.

Outreach activities

The network is developing a workplan for the next two to three years. The Working Group will identify and explore key populations/groups in immediate need of support and plan activities to reach out to these target groups. Transgender representatives have also been appointed from every sub-region and from key sub-populations to rally transgender organisations within their respective sub-regions or areas to become members of the network.

Ms Sitthiphan (Hua) Boonyapisomparn, APTN Coordinator who is based in Bangkok, says, “At this stage, it is important that we develop a comprehensive workplan that addresses the needs of APTN members. We are already in discussion with potential donors and sponsors to explore how they might support APTN programmes.”

For more information about the network or to support its programmes, please contact Ms Sitthiphan at huab2007@gmail.com or HP: +6626120365.

Note to Editors

The APTN is categorised according to seven sub-regions and seven key populations. Each group is represented as follows:

Danisha (Malaysia) for transgender drug users

Jetsada Taesombat (Thailand) for transgender youth

Jin Qiu (China) for China Sub-Region

Khartini Slamah (Malaysia) for senior transgender women

Laxmi Narayan Iripathi (India) for India Sub-region

Leona Lo (Singapore) for Developed Asia Sub-region

Luluk Surahman (Indonesia) for Insular Southeast Asia Sub-region

Manisha (Nepal) for South Asia Sub-region

Prempreeda Pramos Na Ayutthaya (Thailand) for the Greater Mekong Sub-region

Sam Sela (Cambodia) for transgender people living with HIV

Sulastri (Malaysia) for transgender sex workers

Zahida Hijra (Bangladesh) for hijras

Vacant – for transgender Muslims

Vacant – for Pacific Sub-region

About APTN

The mission of APTN is to enable transgender women in the Asia Pacific region to organise and advocate to improve their health, protect their human rights, and enhance their social well-being and the quality of their lives. The network startup is supported by the 7 Sisters Coalition of Asia Pacific Regional Networks on HIV/AIDS, Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM), and Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW)

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