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**HALF EMPTY OR HALF FULL? APCOM TAKES STOCK ON WORLD AIDS DAY 2011**  
***Key Coalition's Annual Report on MSM HIV Issues for Asia and the Pacific***

**Bangkok, 1 December 2011** – Significant global and regional policy progress will be undone by budget cuts at the global level. This is a major cause for alarm for men who have sex with men (MSM) interventions and organisations working at the front line to address issues of stigma and discrimination, high HIV rate among MSM, non-enabling environment and access to services in Asia and the Pacific.

“HIV may have officially marked its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2011, but it’s only just beginning to come of age in many parts of our region,” notes Shivananda Khan, APCOM Co-Chair, Chief Executive of Naz Foundation International and a Steering Committee member of the Global Forum on MSM and HIV (MSMGF). “We’re seeing a rapid rise in the number of MSM HIV cases in countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, where in the Philippines, MSM account for nearly 70% of all new HIV cases.”

Reports show MSM are 19 times more at risk of HIV than the general population. Unless effective prevention measures are stepped up and total spending increased from the current spending of just four per cent, by 2020 MSM could account for almost half of all new HIV infections. Khan continued, “And yet, just a short while ago, we learnt of the cancellation of Round 11 of the Global Fund, a major blow to HIV programming with the Asia Pacific region.”

The 2010 MSM and Multicity HIV and MSM Initiative, that APCOM partnered with the UN and USAID, shows the HIV prevalence among these populations in six cities in the region has reached critical levels. “In many cities, MSM now shoulder a disproportionate burden of HIV infections”, said Edmund Settle, HIV Policy Specialist with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Asia-Pacific Regional Centre. “The study’s primary conclusion demonstrates –that innovative and effective approaches to HIV prevention efforts among MSM require a supportive enabling legal and social environment, addressing discriminatory police and health sector practices and ensuring the full participation of communities in city-level responses.”

APCOM has been actively engaged in global initiatives providing the MSM perspective from Asia and the Pacific to be engaged with policy and advocacy that can impact their work. One example of active advocacy was APCOM's participation in the 2011 Regional Dialogue of the Global Commission on HIV and the Law in Bangkok, part of a global initiative by UNDP. "It was exhilarating to address a high-level gathering of government officials, legal and constitutional experts, law enforcement authorities, NGOs and community activists," said Dr. Stuart Koe, APCOM Co-Chair, and founder of Fridae.com. "With so many differing viewpoints, it was sometimes difficult to empathize with those at opposite ends on the issues. But ultimately we all realized the need to arrive at a consensus as to how best legal frameworks could assist in tackling HIV. It really was a true dialogue and consensus, with all agreeing collectively to begin charting a roadmap for the years ahead."

Other regional and global milestones in 2011 are impacting APCOM and its wide-ranging membership. "This was the year that gave us UNESCAP Resolution 67/9, which for the first time named both MSM and transgender people as key affected populations, along with people who use drugs, sex workers, and people living with HIV," said Geoff Manthey, Officer-in-Charge of the UNAIDS Regional Support Team. "This was carried forward and influenced the unprecedented inclusion of MSM, by name, in the 2011 UNGASS Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. This was followed by the historic UN Human Rights Council resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity."

But for APCOM, perhaps the key highlight of 2011 was its participation and prominent role at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP X) in Busan, South Korea.

"From an advocacy and branding perspective, APCOM made a huge contribution to the 10<sup>th</sup> ICAAP," explained Roy Wadia, APCOM Communications Advisor and Executive Director, Heroes Project (India). "The pre-ICAAP forum 'Beyond Numbers' was inspired by the UNAIDS campaign of 'Getting to Zero', APCOM chose to examine the HIV and the syndemic issues that increase the risk and vulnerabilities of our key populations. Then, we organized four satellites covering current topics such as HIV and social research, engaging the health sector for scaling up services to MSM and transgender persons, transgender health issues and the use of innovative technological approaches to HIV prevention and care. Many APCOM members and Board community representatives served as speakers, presenters, rapporteurs and as members of the ICAAP International Advisory Committee as well. We reported from Busan extensively for our website and Facebook, APCOM was literally everywhere."

“It’s really gratifying to see how APCOM has grown,” said Paul Jansen, Programme Officer, LGBT Rights, MSM and HIV with Hivos, a key donor agency. “We invested our trust and our funding in APCOM soon after it was conceived just a few years ago, and we’ve seen it transform into an entity that’s not afraid to speak up and speak out when the situation demands it. Whether it’s calling on Malaysia to allow a sexual diversity celebration to go ahead, or calling on community-based organisations to collectively demand universal access for MSM and transgender persons, APCOM is quickly fulfilling the regional mentorship role it envisaged for itself.”

As APCOM heads into a new year, it’s adding a new component by bringing onto its Governing Board a region-wide youth representative. “Given that HIV is spreading fastest among young MSM in our region, and given the formidable challenges youth in our key populations face even in this day and age, it is imperative that APCOM recognise this challenge and give it a face and a voice,” said Midnight Poonkasetwatana, APCOM’s recently appointed Executive Director. “The cliché goes that the youth are our future. APCOM wants to ensure that the future of our communities is one that truly works towards zero new infections, zero stigma and discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths. A lofty goal, perhaps, but one that APCOM is committed to, now and always.”

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#### **MSM HIV prevalence in Asia and the Pacific:**

Bangkok\*, Thailand: 31% (2010)  
Cambodia^: 4% (2007)  
Chengdu\*, China: 9.1% (2007)  
Fiji^: 0.7% - 2% (2005)  
Ho Chi Minh City\*, Viet Nam: 14.8% (2009)  
Jakarta\*, Indonesia: 8.1% for MSM and 34% for TG (2007)  
Lao PDR^: 6%  
India^: 7.3% (2009)  
Nepal^: 6% (2009/2010)  
Philippines\*: MSM accounted for approximately 70% of all new HIV case reports in 2008-2009  
Singapore^: 4.2% (2007)  
South Korea^: 5.5% (2006)  
Taiwan^: 4.2%-10% (2004-2009)  
Timor-Leste^: 1% (2009)  
Yangon\*, Myanmar: 12.5% (2009)

\* Men who have sex with men and transgender populations: Multi-city initiative (2010)  
[http://www.msmasia.org/tl\\_files/resources/Hong\\_Kong\\_Meeting\\_Report.pdf](http://www.msmasia.org/tl_files/resources/Hong_Kong_Meeting_Report.pdf)

^ Country Specific Information on HIV, Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) and Transgender People (TG). UNAIDS, Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health, and HIV and AIDS Data Hub for Asia-Pacific (2010)  
<http://aidsdatahub.org>

*The Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM) is a regional coalition of MSM and HIV community-based organisations, the government sector, donors, technical experts and the UN system. The main purpose is advocating for political support and increases in investment and coverage of HIV services in Asia Pacific.*

*For more information on APCOM, please visit our website [www.apcom.org](http://www.apcom.org) and our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/apcom.org](http://www.facebook.com/apcom.org)*

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