

## Conference News

### **8th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP)**

Naeem Hassan Saleem

Canada-Pakistan, HIV/AIDS Surveillance Project (HASP), Pakistan.

International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) has been a feature of Asia Pacific for some sixteen years which started in Australia in 1990. Since then the congress is held every two years, to enhance the regional response to HIV/AIDS. The 8th ICAAP was hosted by Colombo, Sri Lanka from August 19-23, 2007.<sup>1</sup> Approximately, 2,426 delegates from sixty countries attended the occasion and shared advances, lessons learnt, and stories of grassroots achievements. More than two hundred and fifty oral abstracts, seven hundred posters and over hundred speakers presented their work. The 8th ICAAP harboured many features like, People living with HIV/AIDS (PLHIV) lounge, interactive skill building workshops in order to improve skills of participants, and youth forum to acknowledge as one of the key stakeholders and to be heard on forefront of HIV/AIDS response. The Asia Pacific village was the main attraction where people of the region engaged with each other and shared their experiences. Another salient feature of congress was AIDS commission survey in which more than five hundred people from twenty five Asian countries took part. Survey highlighted four main areas for civil society organization which can contribute to the success of fight against AIDS. Among them were; access to information leading to accountability, direct services to the most vulnerable individuals, accountability by monitoring AIDS control programmes and finally participation in policy-making and evaluating the decisions. One of the successful outcomes of the congress was launch of regional coalition by drug users in order to bring their views forward more effectively.

Regionally, China has by far the most injecting drug users (IDUs), with a high estimate of 3,500,000; other Southeast Asian nations with IDU populations over 100,000 include Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Myanmar.<sup>2</sup> Pakistan is no exception and also has high prevalence of IDUs which is estimated to be around 0.14% of the adult population with corresponding estimates of around 125,000 IDUs in the country.<sup>3</sup> Reported sero-prevalence of HIV among these IDUs is 15.8% (95% CI: 14.7, 16.9) and is gradually increasing.<sup>4</sup> Surveillance data indicates that Pakistan's epidemic is being driven by IDUs and harm reduction services to halt preventable HIV transmission among injecting drug users (IDUs) are not sufficient like many other countries.<sup>5</sup> Drug substitution, stoppage of narcotic supply, reduction in demand and large civil society involvement as affirmed in the congress are highly desirable to stop the epidemic.

### **References**

1. 8th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific [internet]. home page. 2008, January 25. Available from:<http://www.icaap8.lk/index.htm>
2. Devaney M, Reid G, Baldwin S. Situational Analysis of illicit drug issues and responses in the Asia-Pacific region: Canberra, Australia. Australian National Council on Drugs; 2006. Executive summary; pp xii.
3. Problem Drug Use in Pakistan: Results from year 2006 National Assessment. Islamabad: United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), Country office for Pakistan; 2007. Executive summary; pp.vii.
4. HIV Second Generation Surveillance in Pakistan: National Report Round II 2006-7. Islamabad: National AIDS Control Program & Canada-Pakistan HIV/AIDS Surveillance Project (HASP); 2007.Summary; pp 60.
5. Sarkar S, Chatterjee A, Bergenström A. Drug related HIV in South and South-East Asia. *J Health Manag.* 2003;5: 277-295.