

8 April 2013

Dr. Denis Broun
Executive Director
UNITAID
World Health Organization, 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211
Geneva27, Switzerland

Re: UNITAID's role in increasing access to treatment of hepatitis C virus infection

Dear Dr. Broun,

We, the undersigned organizations and advocates, held a regional consultation in March 2013 to discuss how to streamline advocacy activities around hepatitis C virus (HCV) prevention, care and treatment access for people living with HIV.

The consultation, though focused on a subset of South and Southeast Asian countries, brought out issues on accessing HCV-related services that have relevance for other resource-limited countries in our region.

As UNITAID is aware, the alarming levels of HCV co-infection among people living with HIV who inject drugs are well documented. In countries like Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal and Thailand, the prevalence of co-infection in this population is as high as 50-100 percent.¹ Data have proven that HIV infection accelerates HCV-related disease progression and mortality.^{2,3} However, a majority of the countries we work in do not provide services related to HCV prevention, care and treatment as a part of national public health programs. Consequently, despite scale-up of antiretroviral therapy and improved control of HIV disease progression in our region, people living with HIV are increasingly dying of HCV-related complications.

UNITAID's role as a potential donor to support HCV treatment in resource-limited countries has been noted in recent studies.⁴ As with its contributions to the global HIV response, UNITAID has the potential to play a critical role in ensuring that HCV treatment becomes accessible and affordable.

We also have been encouraged to see UNITAID working more proactively to understand current challenges and opportunities with regard to HCV medicines and diagnostics in the context of HIV-HCV co-infection.

¹ World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia (2011), **Viral Hepatitis in the WHO South-East Asia Region, Know it. Confront it. Hepatitis affects everyone, everywhere.**

² Mohsen AH, et al. (July 2003) **Impact of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection on the progression of liver fibrosis in hepatitis C virus infected patients**, GUT, International Journal of Gastroenterology and Hepatology.

³ Smit C, et al. (February 2008) **Risk of hepatitis-related mortality increased among hepatitis C virus/HIVcoinfected drug users compared with drug users infected only with hepatitis C virus: A 20-year prospective study**, Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes.

⁴ Ford N, et.al. (March 2012) **Expanding Access to Treatment for Hepatitis C in Resource-Limited Settings: Lessons From HIV/AIDS**, Clinical Infectious Diseases.

We hope this work will result in increasing numbers of people in resource-limited countries accessing treatment in the near future. Studies have demonstrated that people treated for HCV infection in resource-limited countries have treatment success rates comparable to those in developed countries,⁵ further justifying expanded efforts to improve access to HCV treatment.

We request that UNITAID plays a more visible and proactive role in the global response to HCV, and also contributes your technical resources towards comprehensive evaluations of the quality, safety and efficacy of HCV-related diagnostic and treatment products.

With regards,

- (i) Asia Pacific Network of People living with HIV/AIDS (APN+), Bangkok, Thailand
- (ii) Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD), Bangkok, Thailand
- (iii) Centre for Supporting Community Development Initiatives (SCDI), Hanoi, Vietnam
- (iv) Community Network for Empowerment (CoNE), Manipur, India
- (v) Delhi Network of Positive People (DNP+), India
- (vi) Kios Informasi Kesehatan- AIDS Research Centre, Jakarta, Indonesia
- (vii) Malaysian WARDU (MANPUD), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- (viii) Malaysian AIDS Council (MAC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- (ix) Médecins Sans Frontières /Access Campaign, Geneva.
- (x) National Harm Reduction Association, Kathmandu, Nepal
- (xi) Persaudaraan Korban Napza Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
- (xii) Pink Triangle Foundation (PT), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- (xiii) Thai AIDS Treatment Action Group (TTAG), Bangkok, Thailand
- (xiv) TREAT Asia/amfAR, Bangkok, Thailand
- (xv) Vietnam Network of People who Use Drugs (VNPUD), Hanoi, Vietnam
- (xvi) Sarah Zaidi, Bangkok, Thailand

For further information, please contact Giten Khwairakpam at giten.khwairakpam@treatasia.org or telephone number +66 2 663 7561.

⁵ Ford N, et.al. (March 2012) **Chronic hepatitis C treatment outcomes in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis**, Bulletin of the World Health Organization.