
- On Labour Day, Lao Trade Union leaders call on working dads to protect their families from HIV

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VIENTIANE, 1 May 2007 – Leaders of the Lao Trade Union today launched the “Caring Dads” campaign aimed at inspiring working fathers to care for children and protect their families from HIV at the Lao International Trade Exhibition and Convention Centre. The campaign is being launched simultaneously in the capital and two of the provinces most affected by HIV and features a photograph competition for Dad-and-Baby photos, a mini-marathon and concerts at which prizes will be awarded for winning entries. Lao PDR has low HIV prevalence but high HIV vulnerability- due to factors such as increasing labour migration to and from neighbouring countries, and rapid growth of infrastructure development projects like roads, bridges, dams and mines which require workers to work away from home. Homesick workers sometimes seek relief in bars and entertainment venues. Desiree Jongsma, Deputy Representative of UNICEF in the Lao PDR, explained that this campaign also supports the global targets set by United Nations agencies in the Global Campaign on Children and AIDS. “We want to reduce the number of children who get HIV from their mothers. Fathers, of course, play a huge role in this. Fathers can stop the spread of HIV not only in terms of their sexual behaviour but in assisting their wives to access relevant services ranging from antenatal care to voluntary counseling and testing of HIV and sexually transmitted infections”. The communication campaign will be supported by training for MCH workers in counseling and referral.

The Central Lao Trade Union is concerned that Lao people everywhere are aware of the risk of HIV infection, not only for themselves but for their families. The campaign aims to reach working fathers, and mobilize them to take practical steps to ensure that their children are healthy and happy. Under the slogan of “Caring dads build strong families”, the campaign advocates for father’s involvement in caring for wives and children right from pregnancy through to child rearing, with a focus on adoption of safe sex practices, facilitating access to health services and ensuring good nutrition for the whole family. The private sector in Lao PDR has also contributed to the concert and competition awards ceremony on International Labour Day with TICO (Millicom Ltd) and Canon providing prizes for the photo competition. After the concert is over the Lao Trade Union will keep up the good work and continue their workplace-based HIV/AIDS outreach programme, expected to reach 10,000 workers in 2007 with UNICEF support. (www.unicef.org)