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## STORIES FROM THE FIELD

# Vietnam Adopts First HIV Law

**USG assistance ensures rights of affected groups are protected**



*Children living with HIV are among the groups covered by Vietnam's new national law on HIV prevention and control.*

HANOI | On June 21, 2006, Vietnam's National Assembly approved the country's first ever law on HIV prevention and control. The law guarantees equal treatment for people living with HIV and others affected by the epidemic and provides a comprehensive legal framework that will strengthen the national response to the epidemic.

The process of dialogue and debate that led up to the approval of the law involved many stakeholders in Vietnam. This dialogue was critical in reviewing and addressing issues related to stigma and discrimination and ensuring that the views of HIV-positive people were included. In May 2006, shortly before the law was approved, the USAID | Health Policy Initiative and the United Nations Development Program facilitated a consultation with about 40 HIV-positive people to seek their views on the draft law. Recommendations from the consultation were submitted to the National Assembly Committee for Social Affairs to further ensure that the law will be responsive to the needs of those most affected by the epidemic.

Vietnam is one of the 15 focus countries of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and, as such, has received significant funding and assistance in the development of comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment, and care programs.

"In fact, U.S. Government-funded work on this law began back in 2002, and [USAID's] POLICY Project and now Health Policy Initiative were more than instrumental in providing technical assistance to the drafting team and eventually direct support to the National Assembly in revising the draft law, which passed with a number of heavily debated gains for HIV advocates," explains Daniel Levitt, HIV Program Manager for USAID/Vietnam.

He continues, "Those gains include stipulations on ... the legal rights of people living with HIV to gainful employment, the protection of children living with HIV, and the legal right to health insurance benefits."

Vietnam's *Law on Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS* will go into effect on January 1, 2007.