

SPEECH BY THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH

Hon. Jamie Maxtone-Graham, MP

Behavioural Surveillance Research in Rural Development Enclaves in Papua New Guinea: A Study with the Oil Search Limited Workforce

Salutations: Director of the NRI, Dr Thomas Webster, UN and Donor partners, Colleagues from the NDoH, Dr Holly Buchanan and the Behavioural Surveillance Survey Team, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The behavioural surveillance survey (BSS) research which was conducted by the National Research Institute in late 2008 and early 2009, has provided the National Department of Health with data for its National Surveillance System to help monitor behavioural trends with more-at-risk populations over time.

Such research is useful and vital if we are to see any progress in reducing the vulnerability and risk of our people to HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections. As we begin to understand more about people's practices through evidence-based research, including their sexual practices, their knowledge about HIV, and their ideas, beliefs and attitudes about sex and relationships, we can better understand why people do what they do.

NRI's research conducted with the Oil Search Limited workforce not only helps us to understand worker's practices and their behavior towards HIV and AIDS. Moreover, it allows us to make improvements to existing programs so that we can reduce vulnerability and risk within the Oil Search Limited Workforce and other rural development enclaves.

While Oil Search Limited already has an extensive HIV education program in the workplace and the community, NRI's research offers a baseline from which behaviour, knowledge and attitude changes of the OSL workforce can be monitored and improved over time through repeat behavioural surveillance surveys.

Oil Search Limited's existing approaches and their response to the research findings are commendable. Since the NRI research was conducted, and even prior to the release of the report, Oil Search Limited has continued to strengthen its response to the important issues highlighted in the research findings.

This has included:

- increasing the availability of information, advice and condoms to prevent HIV and other STIs as an ongoing intervention across OSL work sites and local communities;
- providing free and confidential HIV and STI testing and making this available upon request, as well as offering this service routinely to all staff;
- increasing security measures for female staff working in operational sites;
- reducing employees' 'stop overs' in Port Moresby when staff transit between their homes and operational work bases;

- Oil Search Limited has also revised their drug and alcohol policy to include random testing of employees; and has also,
- implemented technology to rapidly identify staff who are in breach of the company's internet use policy.

In addition to this Oil Search Limited has had a proactive approach towards reducing risk and vulnerability, with all six of its Company occupational health clinics being accredited by NDoH to provide HIV testing services over the last two years. Oil Search also supports 18 community clinics to provide free HIV testing, treatment and support to local communities.

Oil Search Limited also introduced a HIV policy in 2006, including comprehensive standards for HIV Management in the Workplace.

I am also aware that Oil Search Limited has also applied and has received approval to undertake the requirements of the principal recipient of Round 10 funds from the *Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria*. The Foundation will oversee the management of US\$46 million granted by the Global Fund.

These initiatives and proactive measures as well as responses to the study conducted by the National Research Institute are essential in reducing vulnerability and risk in more at risk populations as well as in communities throughout Papua New Guinea. Such research knowledge and the good use of it for the benefit of the people are necessary if we are to reduce the number of new HIV infections in PNG.

I would like to commend the National Research Institute for conducting this research and making it available to Oil Search Limited and to the wider public. To Oil Search for utilizing this evidence-based research to better inform their programs and policies on the ground and to continue to engage with the findings to improve their response to HIV through the translation of these findings. These results will indeed go a long way in contributing towards HIV prevention strategies and policies that can also be implemented at a local and national level for the benefit of all.

Thank you!