

Statement from Dong Duc Thanh of VNP+ on the Kaletra Global Day of Action:

I am a member of the Vietnam Network of People Living with HIV (VNP+). I have been living with HIV for 18 years and found out I was HIV positive in 2001. When I learned I was infected with HIV, stigma and discrimination from family, community and society were very serious and the law on HIV/AIDS prevention and control had not yet been issued. After receiving the news, my boss suggested I submit a letter of resignation. I faced many difficulties, economic and spiritual. At the same time, many of my friends were dying of HIV/AIDS due to lack of access to ARV treatment.

I was very weak due to weight loss, prolonged diarrhea and mouth sores and emotionally in despair. Later, when I received training on treatment literacy I learned these were opportunistic infections (OI).

Since I was diagnosed, I've tried to lead a useful life as a Peer-educator, counseling and referring clients to receive Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT). I then met a foreign doctor who has been living with HIV for 25 years. He bought generic ARVs from Thailand and brought them to Vietnam for us. Thanks to him, I and some of my friends were saved. We also connected with the network of PLHIV in the Asia-Pacific region (APN+) and went to Bangkok to receive testing for our CD4 counts and viral loads. At the start of treatment my CD4 count was 80.

My health gradually stabilized. I was recruited as a Program Officer for the Health Policy Initiative Project, and even learned English and other skills for work.

My colleagues and I have become experts on HIV/AIDS. We have jointly developed a toolkit on treatment literacy and positive prevention for people living with HIV in Vietnam. We have organized study tours for leaders from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor, and visits to see the care and treatment model in Thailand. After their visits, the Vietnam Ministry of Health implemented new guidelines for HIV/AIDS treatment with the input of experts.

We deeply thank the American people who have supported us through the PEPFAR program. This program has saved many people and given them a new life. Many of us now have love, marriage and healthy, HIV-negative children. We continue to work and learn to contribute to our families, communities and society. Now, through treatment, education, and reduction of stigma and discrimination, we once again are able to have rich family lives, and make valuable contributions to our communities and society. The Vietnam Network of People Living with HIV (VNP+) received a small grant from the World Bank in recognition of our work on providing information of HIV/Hepatitis C co-infection.

Although we have made significant progress in Vietnam, we are very worried about the future and many people still do not have access to treatment. Current projections suggest that 150,000 people will be in need of ARV treatment in 2015. The high price of second-line treatment in addition to costly medicines for Hepatitis B and C (many of us with HIV are co-infected with Hepatitis B and C) place a heavy financial burden on our shoulders. It is likely that I and many of my friends will need access to second-line ARV

treatment sometime in the future, and at its current price, many of us will not be able to afford it.

This is why today we are sending letters to Abbott and the Ministry of Health. We need access to lower priced second-line treatment. An open license from Abbott or a government use license issued by the government for Kaletra (lopinavir+ritonavir or LPV/r) would enable us to import or locally produce less expensive medicines. We hope we will receive positive responses to our letters. Affordable second-line treatment is vital for the Vietnam HIV/AIDS community's ability to continue to make progress fighting this disease.