

**American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR)  
and the Mailman School of Public Health at  
Columbia University - "HIV/AIDS in Asia: Forging  
a Collective Response"**

**"HIV/AIDS Prevention in China: The AIZHI Action  
Project"**

**New York, NY  
December 3, 2002**

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[ BEGIN TAPE]

**ALLAN ROSENFELD:** I think we will get started, as we are late. It's my pleasure to introduce the moderator for the sessions today. Elizabeth Rosenthal, "The New York Times" is one of the Times few medically trained physicians as a full time reporter. And she has spent the last several years in China where many of you have read her remarkable reports from that country. So we're delighted that she's in New York at this particular point in time and will introduce our special guest speaker, Dr. Wan Yan Hai from China.

Elizabeth?

[ applause]

**ELIZABETH ROSENTHAL:** Okay. Well, thank you all for coming. And it's really great to be here. I often feel like my life has followed AIDS around the planet. I was a resident here in New York City in the mid '80s when there was very

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little treatment available. And my job at that point was mostly watching people die of diseases like PCP and other things that are treatable now.

And then after my residency, I've worked in Nairobi for six months and watched the same thing there. And then when I went to China in '97, having changed careers and becoming a journalist, I thought I was done with that. And then on a trip to Henan province in '98, suddenly found myself looking at all the same things I'd seen over at New York Hospital in 1985. So here we go again. And hopefully, this time around though Asia and the Pacific can learn from all of the things we did wrong and we did right here.

So anyway, that being said, it's a pleasure to be here and to introduce Wan Yan Hai, who I've known for several years in Beijing. I guess I should start with the story the first time I encountered Dr. Wan was at Eton (Misspelled?) Hospital, which is one of the AIDS centers in

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Beijing. A doctor there had tried to organize what was going to be China's first support group for people infected with HIV. And what that meeting consisted of was him sort of corralling nine inpatients who were in the hospital getting a trial of some Chinese herbal medicine to come to the lounge and hear a Chinese health official talk about HIV and what it was, and what it wasn't.

That talk as it started was rather paternalistic and condescending. And about 10 minutes into it, Dr. Wan bursts into the room and said -- and confronted her and said, "That'll -- you know, what are you talking about? When are medicines going to be available? Why don't you tell these people the truth?" He had with him another person, young Chinese guy named Sung Hung Fei (Misspelled?), who has HIV/AIDS. And the health official was completely bewildered. And for those of you who haven't operated or worked in China, this is not a normal thing to have happen

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in China. She didn't -- she was speechless. And he was asking the kind of hard questions that no one else is really asking in China today. And he's continued to ask those questions over the last three, four years.

That approach has not always won him many friends within the Chinese government, although the government is moving slowly in the right direction. And I think it's incredibly invaluable and brave of him to be asking those in an environment where you certainly don't get a lot of rewards for doing that. As you all probably remember, his payback last fall was to be detained for about a month. But he also has the distinction, I think, of being one of the few people to be released from state security after his stay there, and to be allowed to go and resume his work.

And I think that's in large part a function of the international pressure and

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international attention that his detention created. And I think, although I'm sure it wasn't a positive experience for him in the long run, it moved the cause of HIV particularly in China, but also in Asia forward. So he is the -- official title I guess is the founder and director of the AAGER (Misspelled?) or AIDS Action Project, which runs website. He also is involved in AIDS prevention and education among students and farmers. And there's no one else like him in China right now. So here he is, Dr. Wan Yan Hai.

[applause]

**WAN YAN HAI:** Okay, I'm really -- yeah, I'm really honored to be here to introduce our work in China. It's Nongao (Misspelled?) project was set up in 1994. And now we have been working for about nine years. Before 2002, this project is basically individual based. And [unintelligible] working informally together and support each other. Since this year, we started

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to organize ourselves as a group, a formal group.

When we found our project, we set up some kind of objectives, like provides AIDS education and information and support people with AIDS. And it was [unintelligible] rights of people with AIDS. And also, working for the rights of gay lesbian people in China. Before 1998, our project -- our focus was among gay and the bisexual men for AIDS education. And in some time, we do, you know, we advocate for the rights of gay lesbian people in China.

Yet one of our many achievements we -- was we push Chinese [unintelligible] association policy to us homosexuality and bisexuality in China. So now it's not a [unintelligible] in China. After 1998, we set up our website and we started our, you know -- we had some new activities, like we move our focus was patients rights. And we talked about the product confusion and [unintelligible].

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And also, we did some research about policy of special education and literature to push some change in the policy level. Two years ago, I got -- I -- yeah, somebody introduced me to Dr. Gao (Misspelled?), Dr. Gao (Misspelled?) Ya Jeh (Misspelled?) who is a doctor in Henan. And after that, we got involved in AIDS in Henan. We support Dr. Gao's (Misspelled?) work by connected her with these people outside, and supported her work.

Last year, we organized some volunteer group, to do investigation in a rural area of Henan. And after that, we got involved with patients there. And it -- yeah, it's -- well, it's serious situation there. And after that, you know, local governments, maybe central government [unintelligible] was us. And okay, and since this year, we started to organize ourselves as a group. And we got in some trouble. And our people, where we had to cancel in one or two days. And our

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meeting were stopped. And people working with us, where monitor and somebody got detained for one or two days. And I got detained for 27 days.

After my release, we got liberated. So our -- we set up an institute. And our application was accepted by government. So now we are, you know, legalized. We -- now we are in a moment to, you know, planning our new objectives and structures, because just two months ago, we created our new institute. And we need to brought our objectives. You know, we did a lot of work on advocacy, writing petition letters and help people to organized themselves.

Now we often need to do work to support children and to organize some outreach education to train peer educators. And also, people in our group, we have some, you know, I want -- how break people in our group, but professionally, we were not well trained. And many members of our group, they are students, journalists or they're just

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some people. You know, they are concerned about the issues.

So -- and we need, you know, training. And we don't know how to manage, you know, how to work, you know, manage our, you know, organization. And also funding issues. So yeah, it is just a new beginning here.

Any questions and comments?

**MALE SPEAKER:** [unintelligible] China's second round application to the Global Fund is largely for Henan or the blood selling provinces. I'm just wondering if you have any thought on why they decided to do that, and if there are any concerns about the way that they're going about that?

WAN YAN HAI: Okay, yeah, about AIDS in Henan, according to the local government estimation, there are 30,000 people infected. But many experts believe at least a million people got infected. And I believe two million people got

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infected there. In many villages, we found [unintelligible] about 50 percent of adult people got infected. Many children are left by parent who died. And many students can't, you know, get school. Just in one county, Lasante (Misspelled?) County, we [unintelligible]. We invited a local activist to help. They visited almost every village there.

And we found there is severe epidemic in about 80 villages. There are altogether 500 villages in Lasante (Misspelled?) County. And we found 80 villages, you know, that have severe epidemic there. And --

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** This is just in one county?

**WAN YAN HAI:** Just in one county. And the blood selling was in 1990, the blood selling was organized by Henan provincial health department. And we've heard that many local government leaders, they motivated, you know, people to share

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blood. In one county, Asian county, a former  
county leader spoke to the audience -- TV  
audience, selling blood is patriotic. Not selling  
blood is not patriotic.

So it's a lot of - they use, you know, a  
lot of, you know, slogans to motivate people to  
sell blood. So there were about 270 blood banks  
all of province. In some counties, there were --  
you know, government blood, you know, banks. And  
also, there's some underground blood dealers.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** When you say blood banks,  
you mean blood selling [unintelligible]?

**WAN YAN HAI:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And  
also, if in some -- even in some village, you  
know, we've heard that there were three, you know,  
underground blood banks.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Can you say just  
something about the Global Fund applications? I  
mean, what I think surprised many of us was that  
when the Chinese submitted their application with

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attending the Global AIDS Fund, it was quoted on eight central provinces [unintelligible]. There you go. The application happily was focused on these eight central provinces. And do you want to say something or have any ideas about why the government decided it was time now to focus on what for them has been a much more difficult problem to acknowledge?

WAN YAN HAI: Okay. The epidemic there were first found in [unintelligible] five by doctors in Socal (Misspelled?) District, Henan Province. The doctor who found the epidemic were all five. And in the center, you know, we are closed by Henan provincial government.

In 1999, another doctor found an epidemic. And the journalist who reported the stories in the year 2000 were fired immediately. And those local governments and central governments keep silent. So it wasn't an issue. And we didn't know what happened.

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Yeah, recently, in the past two years, because of, you know, many, you know, international reporters, you know, reporting, and also people in the communities, they realized what happened to them. And they got, you know, really angry. And some protests they're organized by people there. And also, you know, like our group, we organized -- we helped people there to organize support group to write petition letters to the central government for drugs and education and prevention.

So maybe our governments realized it's a time for them to take some immediate action to provide treatment, otherwise you know, there might be some, you know, something might happen. So maybe, you know, yeah, let's -- many people died there. We found about more than -- about 10 percent of infected, you know, people died in -- earlier this year, yeah.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Are there other

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questions? Way in the back? Can you come to the mike? Thanks.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** You said your organization work on [unintelligible] issues. Is it -- are there any legal challenges you address? And also, how do you address issues regarding sexual minorities at ruler level? And do you know the prevalence of HIV among sexual minorities? If you can address that?

**WAN YAN HAI:** Okay. Yeah, maybe I need some translation help.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** Can I repeat the question slowly or?

**WAN YAN HAI:** Okay. Yeah, there are, you know, homosexuality people in rural areas. But it's really [unintelligible] say because many people are still very isolated. And most of established communities we found, you know, in cities, especially you know, in the big cities. Now we found there about, you know, 500 gay

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lesbian websites. And there are gay baths in almost every, you know, big cities. And there's some hotline, gay lesbian hotline service provided by the community and some scholars in -- yeah in certain cities. And also, some hotline and some scholars, they even got support from [unintelligible] for education among gay community.

So Chinese government now is much liberal in sexuality issues. Yeah.

**FEMALE SPEAKER:** I think we have time for one more. Someone's coming to the mike. Sorry.

**MALE SPEAKER:** I just wanted to applaud the bravery of you and your colleagues working in China. And it stands as a -- as an object lesson to those of us who live in more privileged settings. Before you spoke, we heard about the rhetorical commitment of the U.S. government to treating HIV internationally as a strategic crisis. Rhetoric is very, very cheap. Kofi Annan

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called for \$7 to \$10 billion a year from the G-8.

The Global Fund has a paltry sum to distribute given those needs.

When the U.S. feels threatened, as it seems to feel threatened by Iraq, it talks about spending \$100 to \$200 billion. That's the kind of commitment the U.S. government should be making to people like you and throughout the world. Thank you.

[ applause]

**ELIZABETH ROSENTHAL:** I think, unfortunately, we don't have more time for questions. We have to move on with the program, but Dr. Wan will be around all day. And I urge you all to corner him and ask him lots of questions privately. He always has good answers.

[ applause]

**WAN YAN HAI:** Okay, yes, thank you. Yes.

[ END TAPE]

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