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HIV/AIDS prevention news stories

HIV Discrimination Bill in Nigeria from allafrica.com
LAGOS, 26 March 2009 — The recent bill proposed by President Umaru Yar'Adua to the Senate, seeking to make a law that would curb discrimination against people living with Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in the country when passed into law would help check the spread of the virus as well as encourage infected persons to act with dignity in the face of adversity. The essence of the President's bill is to make a law for the prevention of HIV-based discrimination. In addition, a similar bill is before the House of Representatives entitled "A Bill to Prohibit and Punish Discrimination against Persons Living with HIV/AIDS in Housing, Employment, Social, Educational and Health Services and in all forms of Social-Economic Life and other Connected Matters, 2008."

The second bill, which has gone through second reading, is sponsored by Ms Olajumoke Okoya-Thomas, representing Action Congress (AC) and Lagos Island. In her lead debate, Ms Okoya-Thomas said the "bill seeks to affirm the commitment of the House to enact and adopt the legislative measures to protect the human rights and dignity of HIV infected persons and persons living with AIDS," adding that "because of the ignorance about HIV and prejudice, people living with HIV/AIDS face discrimination in all aspects of their lives, and this discrimination makes it even more difficult for government to reduce the rate of HIV transmission in society."

She cited section 42 of the Nigerian Constitution and noted that it forbids "discrimination on grounds of community affinity, ethnic group, and place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion. Nothing in this section expressly or by implication, forbids discrimination on grounds of health."

The major problems faced by the people living with HIV/AIDS are discrimination and stigmatization. There have been several reported cases of widespread discrimination against infected persons. They are prevented from travelling abroad, seeking employment, attending school, marrying, associating with other people and even taking Holy Communion in churches. Logically, alienating them from society, making them feel they have nothing to gain by protecting themselves or others, breeds helplessness, indifference and lack of respect for other people. It is such attitude and conditions that aid the spread of the virus, which experts say could also undermine any efforts to encourage the voluntary behaviour changes that are necessary to prevent the spread of infection. In contrast, policies and laws that reduce the stigma attached to HIV infection and build the self esteem of people with HIV or at risk of infection can create an environment of mutual trust, support, and collaboration that is critical to bringing about and sustaining behaviour change.

It was also the devastating effect that discrimination has exerted on the persons living with it that prompted the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), Mr. Ban Ki-moon, at the opening of the XVII International AIDS Conference in Mexico last year to call for bolstered global efforts to tackle HIV/AIDS with emphasis on universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support as well as discrimination and stigmatization.

Mr. Ki-moon also applauded countries, which have put legislation in place to reverse the spread of the infection. "In countries with legal protections in place, those living with the disease have greater access to services, resulting in fewer infections, less demand for anti-retroviral treatment and fewer deaths," Mr. Ki-moon said at the world's largest forum on the pandemic, while adding that discrimination was still widespread.

Contrary to some misconceptions or myths associated with the disease, it is not spread through a handshake, body contact or kissing (except there are laceration). Many people still believe that they may fall ill through casual contact with a person who has HIV or AIDS. This fear constitutes a major obstacle to care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS at home, in the community, and even at established health care facilities.

It is a fact that AIDS, which is caused by HIV, is spread through blood, semen, vaginal secretions, and breast milk. The most common method of transmission is unprotected sexual intercourse with an HIV-positive partner. Other routes include widow inheritance, sexual abuse of children, migration, transfusions of HIV-infected blood or blood products; tissue or organ...

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transplants; use of contaminated needles and syringes (or other skin-piercing equipment); and mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding.

HIV is not a death sentence. Infected persons can prolong their lives with adequate treatment and care. If the bill is passed into law, it could be used to establish a protective and supportive framework for people affected by the disease. Therefore, the law would have a role to play in the response to the HIV infection as well as acting as a prelude to curbing and reversing the spread of AIDS by the target date of 2015 as enunciated in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

We urge the lawmakers to give the bills before them accelerated hearing and pass them into law as a measure to curb the spread of the disease.

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**WHO Report: More People Dying of TB Are Infected With HIV from voanews.com**


The World Health Organization reports nearly 9.3 million people became ill with tuberculosis in 2007, of these new cases it says 1.4 million or 15 percent were linked to HIV.

The TB Control report finds one out of four TB deaths, or nearly one-half million deaths, is HIV related. That is twice as many as previously recognized.

WHO HIV/AIDS Department Director Kevin De Kock says the escalating number of TB deaths among people infected with HIV shows a need for a joint, well-coordinated response to the two epidemics.

He says the burden of HIV-TB is unequally distributed. "About 79 percent of all HIV-associated TB cases occur in sub-Saharan Africa - 79 percent and about 11 percent in Southeast Asia," said Dr. De Kock.

"Of the five countries in the world with the greatest number of new tuberculosis cases annually, two of them have generalized HIV epidemics. And, that is South Africa, a country with a large population and very high HIV prevalence rate and Nigeria," he added.

Dr. De Kock notes Nigeria has a lower prevalence of HIV than South Africa, but because of its very large population, many people are infected with the disease.

He says people living with HIV have a risk of developing tuberculosis that is about 20 times higher than that compared with people who do not have HIV. He says it is important that people with HIV be tested for tuberculosis so they can get the proper treatment to cure the disease and prevent it from spreading.

"HIV-infected people are highly vulnerable to getting TB and if they get a variety of TB that is resistant against drugs, they have very high case fatality rates, very high death rates," said Dr. De Kock. "We have seen outbreaks of such events in South Africa, in other countries related to hospitals, anti-retroviral therapy clinics, prisons and so on. Just to point out, this is a reflection of weak TB programs and inadequate health systems that these situations arise."

The WHO report reveals a sharp increase in HIV testing among people who have tuberculosis, especially in Africa. As a consequence, it says more people are receiving the treatment they need, although the numbers remain small.

The World Health Organization warns drug-resistant forms of tuberculosis are growing and pose some of the greatest problems. In 2007, it estimates 500,000 people had multi-drug resistant tuberculosis, but less than one percent of them were receiving treatment.

The World Health Organization says great progress against both tuberculosis and HIV has been made in the past few years. But, it notes tuberculosis still kills more people with HIV than any other disease. It says more work and money is needed to scale up effective interventions for the prevention, treatment and care of TB worldwide.

New Ways Needed to Convey HIV Messages in Mozambique from allafri.com

Ndlala — Mozambique's first lady, Maria da Luz Guebuza, said on Tuesday that the country should review the way in which messages about preventing HIV infection are conveyed.

Speaking at the locality of Ndlala, in the southernmost district of Matutuine, as she wound up a four day tour of Maputo province, Guebuza said the age of the people giving the message was an important factor.

Guebuza warned that the fact that adolescents and young people are in charge of conveying messages on HIV and AIDS to all age groups, including adults, may be affecting the way people accept the information.

She believed that adults may not accept the messages conveyed by their own children, nephews and grand children, because HIV/AIDS is a sensitive issue.

Guebuza argued that young people should work with their own age group, while community and religious leaders should work with the adults, if those messages are to have any significant impact.

"We must review, somehow, who should convey these messages to whom. Youngsters should work with those of their own age group, using the language they use in their day-to-day communication", she said.

During her tour of the province, Guebuza talked about prevention of HIV infection and other diseases, such as malaria and cholera, and urged people to work hard to fight against poverty. She promised to channel the concerns raised at her meetings to the relevant authorities.

The latest available statistics put the HIV prevalence rate in Mozambique at 16 per cent of people aged between 15 and 49.

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