

HIV/AIDS and Human Security: An Agenda for Africa
Policy Group Advisory Meeting, Addis Ababa, 2005 - Centre for Conflict Resolution.

The policy advisory group meeting in Addis Ababa was premised on the recognition that in order to address human security concerns in Africa it is vital to focus on the HIV/AIDS pandemic currently ravaging the continent. While Africa has faced epidemics in the past, none has had an equivalent impact in terms of the decimation of the productive sectors of society. In 2004, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that 25.4 million African adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS; 3.1 million more infections occurred and 2.3 million Africans died of HIV/AIDS in the same year. Sub-Saharan Africa is currently home to two-thirds of those living with HIV/AIDS and nearly 74 percent of all AIDS-related deaths in the world.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on Africa is already devastating and has widespread social, economic, political, as well as peace and security ramifications. Not only is HIV/AIDS the leading killer of adults in Africa, it is also further entrenching poverty, weakening the productive capacities of countries, overwhelming already over-extended healthcare systems, and threatening both national and continental security. As a result of HIV/AIDS, Africa's life expectancy has been slashed by 20 years, and its economies are losing billions of dollars annually.

Recognizing that HIV/AIDS was a "state of emergency" on the continent, African leaders met in Abuja, Nigeria, in April 2001 to develop strategies to combat this pandemic. Other important initiatives have also been pursued and most recently the AU has developed an HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan 2005-2007, which is being implemented in partnership with several regional economic communities.

The September 2005 policy meeting in Addis Ababa sought to examine Africa's leadership on these issues in order to contribute to the mainstreaming of a holistic response to HIV/AIDS in the work of the AU. A recurrent theme emerging from the Addis Ababa seminar was the need to recognize that HIV/AIDS is a symptom of deeper socio-economic and development problems in Africa that must be urgently addressed. Poverty, poor nutritional conditions and underdevelopment are all key factors that contribute to the vulnerability of Africans - particularly young African women - to the pandemic.

In this regard, a balance must be struck between issues of state security and human security in order to address HIV/AIDS and other development challenges. Furthermore, the AU's challenge remains to provide leadership on continental strategies on HIV/AIDS. Effective co-ordination must be established in policy development among the AU, regional groups, national governments and civil society. Policies and funding from international donors should also respond to African realities and not to externally-driven agendas; emphasis should also be placed on the extent to which Africa can mobilize its own resources and use them effectively, rather than being too dependent on the international donor community.