

AIDS Burden Highest in Southern Africa

Launch of the 2008 Global Report on AIDS

Johannesburg, 29 July 2008 – The global AIDS burden is still harshest in Southern Africa with nine countries¹ accounting for 35 per cent of all HIV infections and 38 per cent of AIDS deaths in 2007, according to new data from the *UNAIDS 2008 Report on the Global AIDS epidemic*.

South Africa continues to have the largest epidemic of any country with an estimated 5.7 million people living with HIV. Among 15-24 year olds in South Africa women and girls account for more than 90 per cent of new infections. However compared to previous years the South African epidemic does appear to have stabilized as have the epidemics in Malawi and Zambia.

Swaziland has the world's highest national adult HIV prevalence of 26 per cent.

In Mozambique the epidemic continues to grow with some provinces exceeding 20 per cent prevalence and infections among young people increasing across the country.

Unlike Southern Africa many of the national HIV epidemics of East Africa appear to be receding or have stabilized. For example Uganda's adult prevalence appears to have stabilized at around 5.4 per cent but signs of resurgence in sexual risk taking could trigger a further growth in the epidemic. Kenya reported an HIV prevalence of between 7.1 per cent and 8.5 per cent this year compared with the 2003 estimate of 6.7 per cent.

Reductions in HIV prevalence were most notable in Zimbabwe and Botswana. In Zimbabwe HIV prevalence among pregnant women attending antenatal clinics fell from 26 per cent in 2002 to 18 per cent in 2006. In Botswana figures for pregnant 15-19 year-olds dropped from 25 per cent HIV prevalence in 2001 to 18 per cent in 2006.

¹ Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe

The report shows sub-Saharan Africa accounting for more than two thirds (67 per cent) of all people living with HIV and for three quarters (75 per cent) of all deaths due to AIDS in 2007:

- An estimated 22 million [20.5 million – 23.6 million] people living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa in 2007;
- An estimated 1.9 million [1.3 million – 2.4 million] newly infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa in 2007;
- 1.5 million [1.3 million – 1.7 million] deaths due to AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa in 2007.
- An estimated 33 million [30.3 million – 36.1 million] people, globally, living with HIV in 2007;

Mark Stirling, Director of the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa, said: “There is encouraging evidence of stabilizing and even declining epidemics in the region but the majority of countries have yet to turn the tide on AIDS. Southern Africa is still in the midst of a hyper endemic AIDS epidemic with as many as one in four adults living with HIV in many communities. Women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected.”

“New infections continue to outnumber the number of people starting treatment. We need to build on existing efforts in HIV prevention and robustly address the gender dimensions of the epidemic in this region.”

Ms Elizabeth Mataka, the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa said: “We need to recognize and celebrate the real progress many countries have made against AIDS but we must also continue to highlight the challenges and the realities of the epidemic in Eastern and Southern Africa. The intensity of the epidemic means that our efforts towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and universal access to prevention, care and treatment must be equally intense.”

The report cites heterosexual intercourse as the main driver of the epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa; however it includes evidence that suggests that the epidemic in the region is more diverse, citing injecting drug use as well as unprotected sex between men as an important factor.

Nearly 3 million people were receiving antiretroviral treatment in low and middle income countries at the end of 2007 and increases in treatment coverage have been extraordinary in many countries for example Namibia, where treatment coverage was only 6 per cent in 2003 and 57 per cent on 2007. Botswana has achieved one of the world’s highest coverage rates of HIV treatment, delivering drugs in 2007 to more than 90 per cent of those who need them.

UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa has identified the following priorities to improve the region's AIDS:

- *Increased social mobilization* with the strong involvement of males, that addresses multiple and concurrent partnerships, age-disparate/intergenerational sex and transactional sex
- *Scaling up public health interventions* that include adolescent friendly health services, the acceleration of programmes that prevent mother to child transmission of HIV and the expansion of male circumcision services
- *Structural interventions* that keep girls in school, increase women's economic independence and recognize women's property and inheritance rights
- *Improved Surveillance and Monitoring* through greater investment in tools and capacities to monitor the effects and the evolution of the HIV epidemic
- *Further research* on the structural drivers of the epidemic including the relationship between alcohol and HIV risk as well as HIV prevention efforts targeting sero-discordant couples

In 2001 Heads of State and Government Representatives of 189 nations gathered at the first-ever Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on HIV/AIDS and adopted the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS that guides national AIDS responses. The Declaration of Commitment covers ten priorities, from prevention to treatment to funding. It was designed as a blueprint to meet the Millennium Development Goal of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

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About the UNAIDS 2008 Report on the Global AIDS epidemic

The 2008 Report on the global AIDS epidemic, prepared by UNAIDS and its Cosponsoring agencies, is the most comprehensive report on the response to AIDS. It uses data from 147 countries against 25 core targets set in the UN declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS adopted in 2001, and the political declaration adopted at the 2006 High Level Meeting on AIDS. The information presented in the report enables readers to assess progress made since 2001 and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the AIDS response to date.

About UNAIDS

UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS' Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org