

HEALTH

Fete to mark World Aids Day tomorrow

By MWANGI GITHAHU
and JULIUS BOSIRE

Tomorrow is the World Aids Day, which since 1988 has been set aside by the international community to raise both money and awareness about the pandemic.

President Mwai Kibaki will be at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre at mid-day to launch the Pamoja campaign on behavioural change. Earlier in the year, the President appeared in an advert for the Pamoja campaign. The World Health Organisation will use the day to launch what they are calling the 3X5 Campaign. This is an attempt to get three million people worldwide on anti-retroviral therapy (ARVs) by the year 2005.

HIV-positive girl narates her ordeal to ministers

Organised by the National Aids Control Council, the day's events will begin with two simultaneous processions in Nairobi. One from the All Saints' Cathedral and the other from Jeevanjee Gardens, both converging at the KICC.

The day will also see the relaunch of the Constituency Aids Control Committees. Like last year, the theme is fighting stigma and discrimination and this message will be underlined by the slogan "Live and let live".

Aids activists say that in Kenya, discrimination is a problem both at community level as well as at the national level. They say that though in 1998, Aids was declared a national disaster, the Government has failed to treat HIV/Aids as an emergency.

Vice-President Moody Awori yesterday sent MPs with a message to their constituencies: "Go out there and sensitise the people on the seriousness of the Aids scourge and tell those with the virus of the possibility to live and contribute positively to the development of this nation."

Health minister Charity Ngilu said that an Aids vaccine would soon be in the market.

Minister of State Chris Murungaru said more than 500,000 children orphaned by Aids were unable to benefit from free primary education.

Mr Awori was officially opening a two-day HIV/Aids workshop for MPs at a Mombasa hotel. The seminar was organised by the National Aids Control Council. The VP said campaigns held for the past 15 years had increased the awareness level of Kenyans about the dangers of HIV/Aids to over 90 per cent.

However, he said that the quality of awareness may not be substantive enough to catalyse behaviour change and address sexuality matters among the youth aged between 13 and 19 years. The VP admitted that there was a general lack of political commitment in the fight against Aids.

Mrs Ngilu asked MPs to support her ministry in the fight against the scourge, saying that people with HIV should be encouraged to live.

She introduced a young girl who went to her office three months ago crying, saying she had been rejected by her family for having Aids. She was given drugs. She attended the meeting yesterday and gave her testimony.

In Kenya, there are one million Aids orphans and 2.5 million people living with HIV, Mrs Ngilu said.

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Photo/Gideon Maundu

Ms Jacqueline Moroe, who has been disowned by her parents in Narok District for being HIV-positive, narrates her ordeal during an Aids workshop for MPs at a Mombasa hotel yesterday. With her is Health minister Charity Ngilu who said the girl is being treated at the Kenyatta National Hospital.

Forum for headteachers

By SUNDAY NATION
Reporter

A national primary headteachers' association launched yesterday was warned against getting involved in trade union matters. Education assistant minister Beth Mugo asked members of the Kenya Primary Headteachers' Association to remain focused on their ideals and goals.

"You must remain a professional and welfare organisation and leave union matters to the Kenya Union of Teachers. If you fail to distinguish your role clearly, you will fail and fail your school communities," she

warned. Mrs Mugo was speaking on "The role of primary school headteachers in the implementation of free primary education" at Nairobi Primary School where the association was launched.

She warned headteachers against illegal and unnecessary levies. "Under the free and universal primary education scheme, no child should be expelled for failing to raise any levy, even if it is official," said Mrs Mugo, who asked the headteachers to read the Children's Act 2001.

One official, Dr Ernest Shivutse, urged teachers to further their education and inspire colleagues and students.

Sh11m fraud claim at Yala rice project being probed

By SUNDAY NATION
Correspondent

The Government is investigating a Sh11 million fraud exposed at the contentious Yala rice project.

An audit report unearthed the scandal, whose suspects include government officials and representatives of the investor, Dominion Farms of Oklahoma, US.

The Kenya Anti-Corruption Police Unit is investigating how an alleged payment was made using fake receipts, said Regional Development minister Musikari Kombo.

In a statement, the minister clarified that the Sh2 billion project had not been stopped and asked residents of Yala swamp to remain calm as "the Government is acting in their best interests".

The minister said he would be chairing a Cabinet sub-committee to address the problems of the project. He reiterated the Government's commitment to encouraging foreign investment, describing the rice project as "an excellent model".

However, he asked Dominion Farms to address issues raised in the Environmental Impact Assessment report.

On a mission of prayer

By SUNDAY NATION
Correspondent

A group of missionaries from Uganda are in the country to prepare for a conference to be held from December 10-14 in Nairobi's Kibera slums.

World Trumpet Mission spokesperson Robert Muwanga said: "The church has to rise and seek God."

The group has been in existence for 15 years and uses churches to reach out to professionals, businessmen, families, institutions of learning and political leaders.

Temper flare at HIV conference-over funds

By NGUMBAO KITHI

Temper flared during an Aids conference in Mombasa when a row erupted between MPs and officials of the National Aids Control Council over money used to launch constituency Aids committees.

The MPs had questioned NACC's seriousness in the fight against the scourge "when it had not reimbursed" them money they had used to launch constituency Aids control committees.

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly David Musila shot up and demanded an explanation from the Council as to why MPs' money used to launch the Constituency Aids Control Committees (CCC) was never reimbursed.

Other MPs who supported Mr Musila, including Mr David Menje, Mr Jimmy Angwenyi, Mr Henry Obwacha, Mr Norman Nyagah, Mr Joshua Toro and Cabinet minister Karisa Maitha, accused the Council of lack of seriousness in the fight against HIV/Aids. They said the Council had instead given out a lot of resources to community-based organisations, some of which did not exist.

Health minister Charity Ngilu and the acting director of the Council, Dr Patrick Orege, however, assured the MPs that they would be

refunded their money upon production of receipts. "Each MP was supposed to spend Sh25,000 for the Constituency Aids Control Committees. I will have the money refunded if they can produce receipts," Mrs Ngilu said.

The MPs claimed that majority of the community-based organisations that benefited from the Council's funds to fight the pandemic were fake and had nothing to show for what they had done on the ground.

It took the intervention of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr Francis Ole Kaparo, to cool tempers as the MPs demanded that the issue be addressed at once. He invited the chairperson of the Council, Prof Miriam Were, to give an explanation to the MPs.

Clarification sought

Prof Were told the MPs that the revival of the Aids control committees was listed for discussion in the day's agenda and asked them to be patient.

Later in an interview with the *Sunday Nation*, Prof Were said there was no proper mechanism of funding the committees. "The NACC at the time asked MPs to spend Sh25,000 during the launch of the committees. However, some MPs later claimed to have spent between Sh200,000 and Sh350,000," she said.

NGO to offer free drugs

By SUNDAY NATION
Correspondent

About 1,300 people living with HIV in Kenya are currently on free anti-retroviral treatment offered by Medecins Sans-Frontiers of Spain.

The non-governmental organisation cares for Aids patients in developing countries. In Kenya, the organisation is engaged in four pilot projects in Busia, Homa Bay, Mathare and Mbagathi areas where selected patients are given free drugs.

Speaking in Busia yesterday, the MSS area co-ordinator, Ms Maria Valles, disclosed that Busia district, which has one of the highest Aids prevalence rates in the country, had 80,000 of its residents infected, 8,000 of whom needed anti-retroviral treatment.

Ms Valles said her organisation was currently treating 80 patients in the district and planned to increase the figure to 700 by next year.

Ms Valles was addressing journalists after releasing this year's programme of activities for the World Aids Day celebrations to be marked at the Busia Stadium. The NGO has also set up VCTs and an Aids clinic at the district hospital.

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