

Concerted efforts urged to curb spread

Health Minister Joshua Angatia today leads Kenya in the commemoration of the World Aids Day at Uhuru Park, Nairobi. The theme for this year's World Aids Day is **One World, One Hope**. The theme emphasises the need for people everywhere to put aside their differences and work together to face the challenges of slowing down the epidemic and easing its impact.

It is also a reflection of the universal aspiration to find the means to prevent and cure HIV/Aids and the hope that comes from the knowledge of the approaches that have proved to be successful in caring for people affected by HIV/Aids and in preventing the spread of HIV.

One world

This phrase implies solidarity in diversity. No individual or country is beyond the reach of HIV and its impact.

Whatever the continent, whatever the country, whatever the province or district, whatever the culture, whatever the standard of living, people are affected and are at risk.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids (UNAIDS) estimates that there are over 21 million people currently living with HIV/Aids, 90 per cent of whom live in the Developing World.

It is also estimated that over five new infections with HIV occur every minute.

In the most affected areas, hospitals are overwhelmed with Aids patients, schools, farms, factories, Government ministries, parastatals and industries are losing skilled employees; children are being born infected or are orphaned as their parents die of Aids.

All the gains made in development are being reversed.

As a global problem, HIV/Aids cannot be treated in isolation in a world where contacts between communities, travel and migration between countries are constantly on the rise.

HIV/Aids therefore requires global response. Many poor countries depend on the resources

of richer countries for support in their fight against Aids. Industrialised countries may benefit from innovative strategies for prevention and care in Developing Countries such as Uganda where the Aids Support Organisation has introduced the "post-test club", a group of people - sero-negatives and sero-positive a like-who meet regularly to exchange experiences and bring support to each other.

The tools and strategies of protection against HIV/Aids are of universal interest and relevance.

By replicating successful approaches and by avoiding in one country failures that have occurred elsewhere, needless suffering and waste of resources can be prevented.

One hope

According to the UNAIDS Executive Director, Prof. Peter Piot, people around the world hope for a cure, for a vaccine, for an end to discrimination against people living with HIV/Aids and an end to denial.

Although we are still some way from achieving these goals, there are grounds for optimism.

There is now evidence that efforts to care for people living with HIV/Aids and to help others to remain uninfected have been successful.

Better drugs and simple approaches to treat the most common symptoms of Aids have been found. In some Western countries and in large communities in Uganda and Thailand, the number of new HIV infection have stabilised and even declined.

In Kenya, there is evidence of stabilising infection rates in areas such as Mombasa and Nyeri between 1993 and 1995.

Particularly effective approaches in countries with stabilisation are a combination of several elements including government backing, protection of human rights, adequate resources and activities grounded in community action.

While there is hope, much more need to be done. Our challenge is to ensure that the successes that are

achieved are widely known and can benefit the entire international community.

The implications of the HIV/Aids epidemic needs to become a priority consideration in the definition of social and economic development policies.

The response to the epidemic must be expanded in scope, quality and in terms of the funding that is made available.

Putting the Theme to Use

In order to put this theme into use, we should all see the **One World** theme as inviting us to be inclusive.

In our country, no society or group within the society can remain immune to Aids as the epidemic evolves metamorphoses.

However, there are particular vulnerabilities and risks connected to age, sex, lifestyle or occupation.

For this year's World Aids Day to have an impact, we must involve women's groups, the youth, people living with HIV or Aids, our security forces and others whose occupation take them from home including long distance drivers and *Matatu* crew.

We should also fight prejudice, stigma and discrimination, within ourselves and as expressed in social attitudes and regulations.

By expressing **One Hope**, the theme invites all Kenyans to have a positive attitude and spread the message that prevention works. We should open dialogue about sexuality and behaviours which, when hidden or discussed in whispers, provide HIV with its point of entry.

We should encourage mutual fidelity and use of condoms and work towards changing attitudes which leave women and youngsters without knowledge of their vulnerability and with little chance of refusing sex or negotiating safer sex.

As a way of giving hope to those infected with HIV or living with Aids, let us offer them and their families care and support.

The emphasis on oneness and hope, this theme activates working together for a world able to control HIV, and for a global society which offers care and support to all those whose lives have

been touched by the epidemic in one way or another.

This year's World Aids Day activities in Kenya will be held in every district and division countrywide.

At the national level, they will include several innovative activities such as a youth group Aids awareness at universities, polytechnics and colleges.

An AIDSART competition organised by the Kenya Aids NGOs Consortium attracted 450 entries from primary and secondary schools as well as members of the public.

A cycling competition sponsored by Population Services International will take place in Nairobi ending at Uhuru Park and there will be a drama festival and music extravaganza aimed at pulling young people together with anti-Aids messages, hosted by ARTNET and sponsored by the National Aids and STD Control Programme.

There are also several activities by NGOs in the districts. For example, in Trans Nzoia, there is an AIDSART competition while in Mombasa Mapendo and Action Women's Association has organised a procession and drama festival.

Women fighting Aids in Kenya (WOFAK) has organised songs, drama and muppet show in Homa Bay and in Kitui District, a music and poems campaign in schools has been lined up.

Today, in Nairobi, there will be a procession led by the Kenya Prisons Band from Kamukunji grounds to Uhuru Park where the national commemoration event will be held starting at 9 am.

Focussing around the theme for this year's commemoration, these activities are geared towards enhancing awareness and renewing commitment from all Kenyans in response to the epidemic and its impact. Aids is a major problem

and is a leading cause of death of young economically productive people aged 20-39 in Kenya.

More than 1.1 million people are already infected with HIV and most of them will eventually die of Aids. This is bound to have negative impact on Kenya's social and economic development.

In order to slow the spread of HIV in Kenya and avert serious personal, social and economic consequences that would result from a continued Aids epidemic, we should all respond as **One Nation** against this scourge.

All sectors should develop a collective response since Aids affects all areas of our society at individual, family, village, urban and affluent levels.

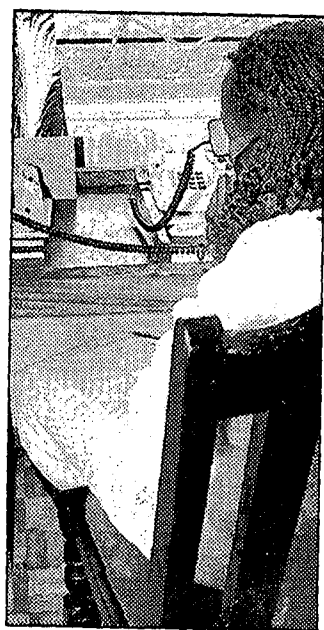
Leaders at all levels should advocate for positive behaviour that prevent the transmission of HIV.

The government has already taken steps in the following areas against the **prevention of sexual transmission of HIV**

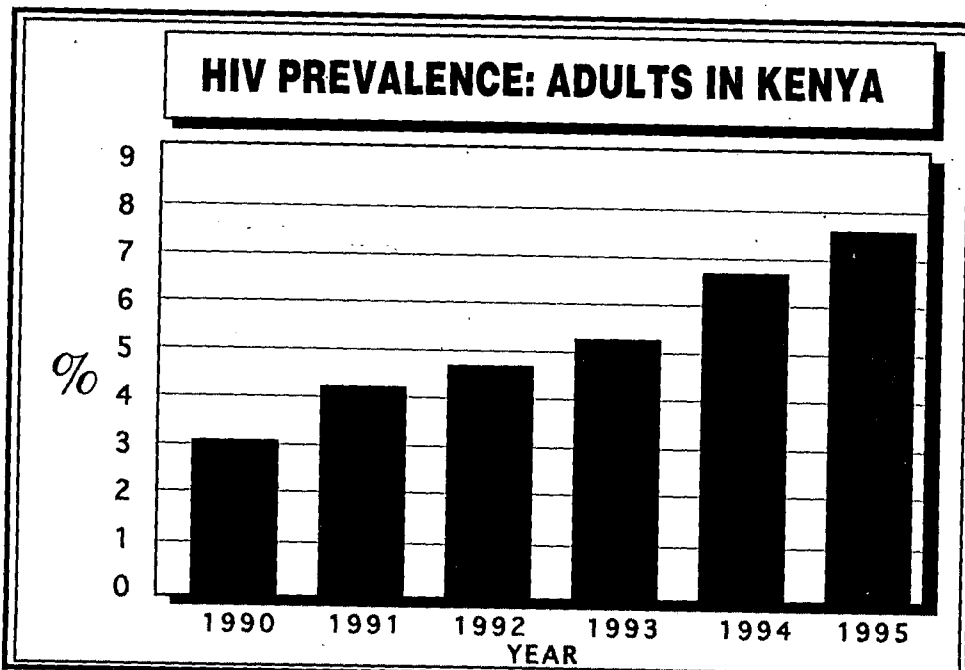
- Aids education youth in and out of school, including family life education, to provide children with the information to protect themselves from HIV when they become sexually active.
- Community-based Aids education, including promotion and provision of community counselling services and public sex education to provide information to adults who are already sexually active about how to protect themselves against HIV infection.
- Control of sexually transmitted diseases through



Reinforcing messages on HIV/Aids have been put on Billboards in local languages that are sensitive to the people's culture.



A helping hand: Talking to victims makes all the difference in their lives.



United Nations Response to Aids in Kenya

In Kenya, there is a UNAIDS office which is located at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre and is headed by Dr. George Tembo who is the Country Programme Advisor for Kenya.

The office co-ordinates the efforts of six UN agencies in the implementation of HIV/Aids activities in support of the efforts of the Government of Kenya through the National Aids and STDs Control Programme.

The overriding goal of UNAIDS in Kenya is to enhance national capabilities to mount an expanded, multisectoral response to the epidemic.

The six agencies forming UNAIDS are United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Health Organisation and the World Bank.

This is the first programme of its kind in the UN system and it is in response to the complex long-term challenge of HIV/Aids which calls for an expanded response.

The UNAIDS co-sponsors bring to this joint endeavour complementary mandates and multisectoral expertise ranging from education and socio-economic development to women's reproductive health.

As the main advocate for global action on HIV/