

## WORLD AIDS DAY

# Most children locked out of treatment

Agency urges leaders to ensure the young ones have access to tests and ARV drugs

By CAROLINE WAFULA

**H**IV/Aids management programmes around the world are focusing more on adults and the youth, leaving out infected children and denying them access to treatment.

According to an international medical humanitarian organisation, nine out of every 10 children born with the virus in every country do not have access to anti-retroviral drugs.

What this means is that half of the children are likely die before their second birthday if they are not treated. At least two million children already infected need care, records indicate.

As a result, Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) has called on governments and donors to scale up paediatric HIV care to ensure that children born with the virus have access to ARVs.

## Easy-to-use pill

"Governments and donors need to be more ambitious in bringing existing paediatric HIV tests and drugs to the children who need them," MSF said during activities to mark the World Aids Day yesterday.

Records indicate that an estimated 1.9

million children are in need of anti-retroviral treatment but only 200,000 are able to get the drugs they need.

In a statement issued yesterday, MSF urged governments the world over and donors to roll out existing tests faster and boost the use of a paediatric version of the standard fixed dose combination (FDC) drug. The tablet contains all needed drugs.

"It was when we introduced this easy-to-use pill that we were able to boost the number of children on anti-retroviral treatment in our projects," said MSF's director of Campaign for Access to Essential Medicines, Dr Tido von Schoen-Angerer.

"We are showing that HIV care for chil-

9

**Number of children out of 10 who do not have access to medicine**

dren is possible. We challenge governments and donors to set ambitious goals and stop abandoning the majority of children with HIV to their fate."

According to MSF, the vast majority of children become infected with HIV through transmission from the mother during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding, hence greater efforts to prevent mother-to-child transmission are crucial.

The humanitarian agency noted that lack of a simple HIV test blocks children's access to drugs, as the detection of the infection is a pre-condition for



Currently, a complicated DNA-based test requiring blood samples to be ferried to advanced laboratories remains the only option for diagnosing infants.

Dr Von Schoen-Angerer said most of the life-saving medicines exist only in adult versions and this needs to change.

"We can treat today but we also need more child-friendly drugs and diagnostics," he said.

**Members of the public light candles at a symbolic grave in remembrance of those who have died of Aids at the Eldoret Municipal Town Hall Grounds yesterday. Photo**

diatric versions of all their HIV medicines or governments will need to push them to do this."

In wealthy countries, MSF noted, paediatric HIV infection had almost been eliminated through successful prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

The agency noted that companies see little financial incentives in developing easier tests and newer drugs for children