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Aids drive to target grassroots

By NATION Correspondents

Leaders in Central Province will

start a grassroots campaign to

fight the spread of H1V/Aids in

the region.

They called for an end to the

i culture of silence on Aids which

they said had killed thousands

and left about two million Kenyans infected with the virus that

causes it.

A leaders forum in Nyeri on

. Saturday resolved to start the

campaign from the sub-locations in order to empower all

community leaders in an attempt

to end the silence on issues of

sex and sexuality.

The leaders had gathered at

the Green Hills Hotel to discuss

the Sessional Paper No.4 on

AIDS in Kenya.

in what was referred to as

“The Nyeri Declaration of

1999”, the leaders .— led by the

Democratic Party of Kenya

chairman, Mr Mwai Kibaki —

said people should start recognizing the magnitude of the HI-

V/Aids problem in the province.

It was announced that during

the grassroots campaign, leaders

will be assisted by the provincial

administrators who will be mobilizing the public. The forum

also said NGOs will be consulted and requested to give financial support.

The Aids problem will be part

of the agenda of issues to be ad

dressed during the national holidays, public meetings and barazas.

The leaders, who included

Members of Parliament from the

province, observed that the rate

at which HIV/Aids was spreading was alarming. They all

called for collective social responsibility in dealing with the

pandemic.

People infected with HIV and

those who have the symptoms

for Aids should be treated at

home as their numbers in hospitals had doubled and was causing a serious congestion in the

institutions.

The community will be encouraged to take care of the patients and reduce the stigma associated with IIIV/Aids infection.

Leaders appealed to the government to put up in place the le

gal framework for the implementation of the Sessional Paper

to hasten the establishment of a

National Aids Council. The government, they said, should take

action against some churches

which are discouraging the use

of condoms.

However, Kiambu and Thika

district MPs failed to attend the

forum. Also, the Nyeri town

MP, Mr Wanyiri Kihoro, his

Kieni counterpart Dr Chris Murungaru arid Mukurwe-ini legislator. Mr Muhika., did not attend.

1JThe high incidence HIV/Aids among teenage girls in

Western Province is being exacerbated by the belief among older infected men that having sex

with teenagers can cure their infection. .

An HIV/Aids symposium in

the province yesterday heard

that older men from age 35 and

above were luring students and

teenage girls into unprotected

sex after learning that they were

infected with either sexually

transmitted diseases or HIV.

The symposium was told that

the main contributors to (tie escalating cases of child defilement in the province were being

caused by the same kind of men.

Men believe that if they have

unprotected sex with teenage

girls, their sexually transmitted.

ailments would be cured, it was

reported.

Dr Sobbie Mulindi of the University of Nairobi said. “22 percent of the primary and secondary school children in the province are now HIV positive. This

is extremely alarming since

among other important factors,

they have been the main source

of blood for the national blood.

bank and their blood is no longer

safe.’..’

Dr 1ulindi said the high incidence of the disease was putting

extreme pressure on bed occupancy government hospitals

and mortuaries across. He added

that the bed occupancy raise in

hospitals had risen from IS to 5 I

percent increase within the last

two years.

More than 70 per cent of the

increase number of people

wíth TB in the region were also

HIV positive.

The meçhc said that a World

Health Organization study had

recommended that Kenyatta

National Hospital mortuary

alone be expanded I O times loccornmodate the dead ‘cause

of Aids-related deaths that were

escalating in the country as a

whole,

He said there was need for political commitment to revise the

population growth rate which

was being adversely affected by

the high death rates occasioned

by Aids, The HIV/Aids problem, the

university lecturer said, was no

longer a medical problem to the

country since its impact was

more adverse economically, socially and politically.