**Controversial Aids**

**programme to start**

**ABIDJAN, Friday**

An AIDS plan to make drugs

cheaper for millions HIV -infected

Africans starts in Cote d' Ivoire in

July despite criticism that only a

lucky few wil1 benefit.

"It will start on July 13" Cote

d' Ivoire's UNAIDS manager Ms

Agatha Lawson told Reuters yesterday

before leaving for the 12th

World AIDS conference in Geneva

from Sunday.: "By around July

20 we should see the first

treatments. "

The, United Nations UNAIDS'

trial aims to sell cut-price AIDS

drugs to up to 4,000 selected

Human Immuno Defiency of patients in each of Cote d' Ivoire,

Uganda, Chile and Vietnam.

The two-year Drug Access Initiative,

criticised by European

Union and World Bank experts on

cost grounds and for its limited

application, could expand if successful,

counters UNAIDS.

UNAIDS figures show HIV

rates in sub-Saharan Africa are often

grossly underestimated. The

region now has an estimated 20.1

million of the world's 30.1 million

cases, with around 800,000 in

Cote d' Ivoire alone - West Africa

's worst-hit nation. World Bank

experts visiting Abidjan have criticised

the programme. (Reuters)