BACKING | Kenyans ‘shunning HIV test’

Muslim rights

lobby gives nod to syringe drive

Muhuri says programme

will help reduce spread

of HIV and Aids among

intravenous drug users

and fight addiction

A human rights lobby has asked

the government to ignore

groups opposing distribution

of syringes to drug addicts in Coast

and fully implement the drive.

Muslims for Human Rights

(Muhuri) in a press statement yesterday

backed the Needles and Syringes

Programme (NSP), saying it reduces

the spread of HIV virus among intravenous

drug users.

“Muhuri wishes to call for the initiation

of needle and syringe programme

for injecting drug users,” said Muhuri

executive director Hussein Khalid.

“In countries where NSP has been

introduced, HIV infections have been

confirmed to have dropped by 25

per cent. Our neighbour Tanzania

is fighting the menace through the

programme. Why should we lag?”

he asked.

Muhuri Rapid Response programme

officer Francis Auma said groups campaigning

against the programme were

doing so out of ignorance.

**To be lenient**

“Let them do their research well,”

he said.

The group also appealed to the government

to be lenient on drug users

by ensuring they are not arrested and

jailed but are instead treated at drug

rehabilitation centres.

The call and support by Muhuri

comes a week after the national antidrug

abuse agency (Nacada) issued

a warning that the programme was

likely to fail unless the government

counters a Muslim religious campaign

against it.

The government plans to distribute

eight million syringes and needles to

more than 26,000 drug users through

the programme.

Separately, an anti-HIV and Aids

lobby has warned that the gains made

in the fight against the disease may be

reversed unless advocacy campaigns

are re-introduced and people urged to

go for testing.

Aids Healthcare Foundation Mombasa

prevention coordinator Mary

Nyatuthi yesterday said people were

not going for the HIV test.

“Sixty per cent of the over 2,300

people we tested last week during

World Aids Day celebrations are

repeat testers. Only 40 per cent are

new clients,” she said in a phone

interview.

She said the low figures were as a

result of people’s lack of worry over

the disease and stigmatisation of the

infected.

“People have changed their focus

from the disease over time and the

worry, especially among girls and

women, is getting pregnant and not

the disease,” she added.

Ms Nyatuthi noted that stigma

had made many people reluctant to

be examined.

She added that some Kenyans

were also not going for the test due

to wrong assumptions that if their

partners are negative, then the same

scenario applies to them.

Overall, the coordinator said, more

females than males were willing to be

tested, with 57 per cent of the people

tested that week being females.