**Move quickly to stop**

**abuse of HIV drugs**

Reports that medicines for the management

of HIV are being used in the brewing of illicit

alcohol have been met with a loud silence, especially

from regulatory authorities. Media reports

in recent days have presented evidence that antiretrovirals

are, indeed, being diverted from legitimate

use to the manufacture of illicit alcohol.

The brewers are sophisticated, packaging their

wares to mimic popular brands in the market and

selling them in legal establishments. The unscrupulous

brewers are also using chemicals such as

the preservative formalin. lt is not known how such

compounds would interact or affect the health of

consumers, but they definitely are not safe.

lt is curious that neither of the ministries of

Health, the National Agency for the Campaign

Against Drug Abuse, or even the Kenya Bureau

of Standards (Kebs) have come out to warn the

public about the dangers of these products. Indeed,

Kebs and the Anti-Counterfeit Agency should have

moved fast to flush out these criminals and saboteurs

of genuine business.

Although the reports did not indicate the volume

of the antiretrovirals involved and whether they

are significant enough to sabotage HIV control

programmes, the relevant civil groups should have

weighed in to seal the loopholes. Non-governmental

groups may not welcome such negative reports

since they may discourage donors, but doing nothing

can only escalate the problem while criminals

find other ways of using the free HIV medicines.

This is a matter of protecting Kenyans' health

and government agencies must act with the same

zeal being demonstrated in the fight against counterfeit

mobile phones to stop these activities. The

current Alcohol Control Act provides the muscle to

deter the criminals.