



COTE D IVOIRE: Nationwide HIV/AIDS prevalence survey to be launched in November

(Reposted from sources cited below)

ABIDJAN, 14 Sep 2004 (IRIN) - Cote d'Ivoire is preparing to launch its first nationwide HIV prevalence survey for fifteen years, covering 10,000 homes in both government and rebel-held areas of the divided country, Mamadou Diallo, the head of UNAIDS in Cote d'Ivoire, said on Tuesday.

The six-month survey would be launched by Cote d'Ivoire's Ministry to Fight AIDS in November and its findings would be used to formulate a more appropriate strategy to help people living with HIV/AIDS in the divided country, he told IRIN.

According to official data extrapolated from Cote d'Ivoire's first comprehensive AIDS survey in 1989, the country has an HIV prevalence rate of 9.5 percent, the highest in West Africa.

However, many health workers fear that two years after civil war split the nation in two, the real rate is now much higher.

"What is interesting for us is to know the real prevalence rate, to get a clear picture of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the country in order to target the needs and to gather the funds," Diallo said.

"It will allow us to know more about the local communities and the way to deal with the issue in the light of the way they perceive the disease," he added.

Volunteers who agreed to undergoing testing and answer a questionnaire about their sexual behaviour would receive free treatment for AIDS if they test positive, Diallo said.

Diallo said the US Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria would fund the provision of antiretroviral (ARV) drugs to those survey participants found to have AIDS.

PEPFAR, which was launched last year, has already earmarked US\$14 million for Cote d'Ivoire, which is one of only 12 African countries, including Nigeria, South Africa, Rwanda and Namibia, to benefit from the five-year global initiative.

Washington has already spent \$2.5 million on AIDS programmes in Cote d'Ivoire. The PEPFAR programme aims to help provide ARV therapy to 77,000 Ivoirians living with AIDS by 2008, prevent 265,000 new infections and cater for 385,000 AIDS orphans.

However, no AIDS testing centres or health support structures to supply anti-retroviral drugs currently exist in the rebel-controlled north, which contains a quarter of the country's 16 million population.

Neither is there any reliable data on the extent to which AIDS has increased in the rebel-held areas since civil war broke out in September 2002.

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