

'Prevention crisis' is hampering global HIV response, warns head of UNAIDS

Complacency over HIV and AIDS has created a “prevention crisis” that risks destabilizing efforts to reach the key 2020 target of fewer than 500,000 new HIV infections per year, the head of the UN agency in charge of fighting the pandemic warned on Wednesday.

Describing his appeal as a “wake-up call” to the global community, [UNAIDS](#) Executive Director Michel Sidibé explained that “partial successes” in saving lives and stopping new infections – some 1.4 million since 2010 – had resulted in a lack of urgency among Member States.

This is despite the fact that 180,000 children became infected with HIV last year, missing the 2018 target of protecting all youngsters from the virus, Sidibé said.

The UNAIDS chief also noted that more than three decades into the HIV epidemic, three-in-five people starting HIV treatment are still not screened, tested or treated for tuberculosis – the biggest killer of people living with HIV.

There is an acute shortage of health-care workers and there is continuing stigma and discrimination – *Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director*

“The number of AIDS-related deaths is the lowest this century,” he said introducing the agency’s latest [report](#), noting that fewer than one million people per year now die from illnesses linked to AIDS, which stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome, caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

Other successes include the fact that three out of four people living with HIV are now aware of their status – an important first step to getting medical help, the UNAIDS chief said.

In addition, a record 21.7 million people are on treatment—an increase of 2.3 million people since the end of 2016, according to the Global AIDS Update 2018.

Despite these apparent successes, globally, new HIV infections have declined by only 18 per cent in the past seven years, UNAIDS says, from 2.2 million in 2010 to 1.8 million in 2017.

At its peak in 1996, 3.4 million people were infected by the virus.

The reduction in new HIV infections has been strongest in the region most affected by HIV, Eastern and Southern Africa, where new HIV infections have fallen by 30 per cent since 2010.



UNAIDS/Laurence Geai

Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS, at the launch of the 'Miles to go—closing gaps, breaking barriers, righting injustices' report in Paris, France.

While these results are welcome, the UNAIDS Chief Executive cautioned that an additional 2.8 million people a year will require access to treatment for the next three years, if global targets are to be met.

And although there is an urgent need to do this, “there are no new commitments to increase resources, there is an acute shortage of health-care workers and there is continuing stigma and discrimination”, he said.

One key and immediate challenge is reducing new HIV infections which are not falling fast enough, Mr. Sidibé added, owing to a lack of impetus on prevention.

This is despite many available measures to protect vulnerable and marginalized communities who face an increased risk of HIV infection, the reason being that they are not being scaled up sufficiently and they “are not reaching the people who need them the most”.

And in a call for Governments everywhere to “protect everyone”, the UNAIDS chief noted the terrible consequences of stigma and discrimination, which lead to the denial of access to critical HIV services and result in more deaths.

“Human rights are universal,” he said. “Bad laws that criminalize HIV transmission, sex work, personal drug use and sexual orientation or hinder access to services must go, and go now.”

In terms of international funding to fight AIDS, resources increased last year, but there is still a 20 per cent shortfall.

A cut of this magnitude “will be catastrophic” for the 44 countries that rely on international assistance for the majority of their national AIDS policy response, said the UNAIDS chief.

[UN experts urge Ukraine to stop ‘systematic persecution’ of Roma minority](#)

Ukraine must take immediate action to stop what amounts to a “systematic persecution” of the country’s Roma minority, who have been targeted in a series of violent attacks allegedly perpetrated by members of extreme right-wing groups, United Nations human rights experts have said.

“We [unequivocally condemn](#) these heinous acts of intimidation and violence against members of the Roma minority in Ukraine,” the three UN experts said in a news release from the [Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) (OHCHR).

“We are also seriously concerned at the growing hatred and racially-motivated violence against this community – and in particular against its most vulnerable members; women and children,” they added.

The independent experts are all Special Rapporteurs, appointed by the Human Rights Council in Geneva: Leilani Farha, on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living; Fernand de Varennes, on minority issues; and E. Tendayi Achiume, on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

The wave of attacks began in April 2018, and targeted women and children in different regions of the country, including the capital Kyiv, as well as in Kharkiv, Ternopil and Lviv.

Roma settlements were set on fire and residents intimidated, assaulted, and forced to leave their homes. The UN experts state that the perpetrators were members of extreme right-wing groups, such as the so-called “Sich-C14” and the “National Brigades”.

“These attacks demonstrate a disturbing pattern of systematic persecution of Roma in Ukraine, compounded by rising hate speech and stigmatization, which appears to be nurtured by the current political and economic situation in the country,” the UN experts warned. They deplored the apparent absence of

effective measures by the Ukrainian authorities to protect members of the Roma minority.

Special Rapporteurs examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

[UN-backed treaty against illicit tobacco trade set to take effect in September](#)

A United Nations-backed treaty aimed at stopping the illicit trading of tobacco products, is set to enter into force on 25 September, marking a diplomatic breakthrough in efforts to protect public health and strike back against the criminal organizations profiting from such deals.

Officials from the Secretariat of the [World Health Organization](#) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control ([WHO FCTC](#)) explain that the package of measures agreed by countries which 45 Parties and the European Union have signed up – known as [the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products](#) (the Protocol)- was developed in response to a growing illegal trade in tobacco products, often across borders.

“With the entering into force of the Protocol, we have made yet another step in our global efforts in tobacco control,” said [Vera da Costa e Silva](#), the Head of Secretariat of the WHO FCTC, which will also serve as the Secretariat for the Protocol.

If the global illicit trade was eliminated overnight, governments would see an immediate gain of at least \$31 billion in revenue; and according to studies, beginning in 2030, more than 160,000 lives could be saved per year, that would otherwise be lost to tobacco-related illness.

With the entering into force of the Protocol, we have made yet another step in our global efforts in tobacco control – Vera da Costa e Silva, the Head of Secretariat of the WHO FCTC

“The illicit trade of tobacco products creates a shadowy market that not only destroys health, but also fuels organized crime and deprives governments of tax revenues,” said [WHO](#) Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

So far, 45 countries have ratified the Protocol plus the European Union and many others are expected to do so over the coming months. The Protocol will

enter into force on 25 September 2018.

“Brazil’s accession to the Protocol is an additional step not only to combat illicit trade, but also to strengthen the national strategy to protect tobacco control policies and promote public health,” said the country’s Health Minister, Gilberto Occhi.

“The accession of the Republic of Mauritius to this Protocol proudly demonstrates the country’s commitment and unflinching support to the international community in their relentless drive to eliminate all forms of illicit trade in tobacco products,” said the country’s Minister of Health and Quality of Life, Anwar Husnoo.



Arne Hoel / World Bank

Overview of Tanger-Med, a cargo and passenger port located about 40 km east of Tangier, Morocco.

Brazil and Mauritius are among the 181 parties to the WHO FCTC – an overarching agreement, which can be strengthened by associated protocols.

The WHO FCTC entered into force on 27 February 2005 and has since become one of the most rapidly and widely embraced treaties in United Nations history. Only WHO FCTC parties can become parties to the Protocol.

Protocol aims to make supply chain of tobacco products secure

The Protocol covers all forms of illicit trade in tobacco products – any practice or conduct related to producing, shipping, receiving, being in possession of, distributing, selling or buying tobacco products, that are prohibited by law.

The Protocol aims to make the supply chain of tobacco products secure through a series of governmental measures. It requires the establishment of a global tracking and tracing regime within five years of its entry into force.

Other provisions to ensure control of the supply chain include licensing, recordkeeping requirements, and regulation of internet-sales, duty-free sales and international transit.

To address the illicit trade that already exists, the Protocol establishes new criminal guidelines, addresses liability and seizure payments, as well as the disposal of confiscated products.

Other obligations aim to boost international cooperation, with measures on information-sharing, technical and law enforcement cooperation, mutual legal and administrative assistance, and extradition.

In light of the irreconcilable conflict between the tobacco industry's interests and public health interests, Parties have to ensure that any interaction with the tobacco industry is carried out with maximum transparency, and must not delegate any of their obligations in tracking and tracing to the tobacco industry.

The first session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol ([MOP1](#)) will take place in Geneva, Switzerland from 8 to 10 October 2018, immediately after the eighth session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC ([COP8](#)).

Somalia is opening a 'new chapter of its history' declares UN political affairs chief as forum ends with renewed commitments

A high-level gathering of representatives from the Somali government and the international community, including the United Nations, ended in Brussels today with renewed commitment to support the Horn of Africa country's progress in a range of areas, such as state and peace-building efforts.

Officials from 58 countries and six international organisations were present for the adoption of the so-called Mutual Accountability Framework of the New Partnership for Somalia (MAF) at the Somalia Partnership Forum, to be implemented over the next six months.

The MAF details the joint commitments of Somalia and its international partners in the areas of political reforms, security, economic development, and recovery and humanitarian assistance, as the country rebuilds after decades of armed conflict and climate-related shocks.

“Somalia opens a new chapter of its history, with the potential to fundamentally transform its future,” the [UN Political Affairs](#) chief, Rosemary DiCarlo, said in a session ahead of the MAF’s adoption.

The Under-Secretary-General added that the country’s security transition plan – which allows for Somalia to gradually assume responsibility for security across the country, including progressively transferring tasks from the African Union Mission in Somalia, AMISOM – represents remarkable progress in Somalia’s state building process

Ms. DiCarlo praised Somalia’s political leaders, many of whom were present at the forum, while noting that the implementation of the MAF’s commitments would not be possible without the allocation of adequate financial resources.

The MAF provides for Somalia and its international partners to agree on and take stock of progress in jointly achieving key objectives to strengthen the country’s state-building and peacebuilding processes. It is considered a bedrock of partnership for the country’s development.

“The United Nations is fully committed to Somalia’s future, and will support implementation of the plan,” Ms. DiCarlo said, also stressing that the world body will work closely with the African Union and all other partners.

The UN official flagged that over the next six months Somalia will need to advance its preparations for the ‘one person, one vote’ elections in 2020-2021 and the constitutional review process, and ensure solid agreements are in place regarding the allocation of powers and resource-sharing between the central government and federal member states.

The political roadmap, Ms. DiCarlo highlighted, will also need to provide for gender-inclusive politics, and a significant engagement with civil society and private sector actors.

Organized by the Federal Government of Somalia, the European Union and Sweden, the Forum is a recurring international gathering to promote peace and development processes in the Horn of Africa country.

This week’s forum follows on from gatherings held in London and Mogadishu over the past two years. Another high-level meeting will be held in six months’ time to take stock of the outcomes of the Brussels meeting.

[Small and sustainable: “Tiny houses” could be solution to world’s housing](#)

problems

They're small, self-sustaining – and they could revolutionize the way we think about housing around the world, as building materials become scarcer.

Measuring just about 22-square-meters, or some 200-square-feet, a demonstration unit for the eco-friendly and affordable housing, debuted on the UN Plaza in New York this week.

This structure is a type of “tiny house” which is traditionally comprised of one room with a loft or pull-out bed, complete with hidden storage, and condensed amenities, such as a kitchen, that maximize the space available to live in.

The design, created by [UN Environment](#) and Yale University in the United States, in collaboration with [UN-Habitat](#), is meant to get people thinking about decent, affordable housing that limits the overuse of natural resources and helps the battle against destructive climate change.

The design is created specifically to be compatible with New York's seasonal climate of cold winters, and hot summers. New designs have also been drawn up to suit the climate in Quito, Ecuador, and another major world capital, Nairobi, in Kenya.

The design was created in collaboration with Gray Organschi Architecture.