

'No cure' for HIV in Zimbabwe says UN, following claims from local preacher

The United Nations in Zimbabwe is reaffirming that people living with HIV and AIDS need to continue with antiretroviral (ARV) therapy to manage their infections, after a local preacher reportedly claimed that he had received divine revelation of an herbal cure.

In a [statement](#) released on Wednesday by the [UN in Zimbabwe](#), Dr. Alex Gasaira, [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) representative in the country, explicitly stated that “there is no cure for HIV infection.”

According to media reports, the Zimbabwean minister notified his congregation in the capital Harare on Sunday of the “cure” for HIV and AIDS. He claimed that a healing plant had been revealed to him by God, sparking a media outcry.

The nation’s largest newspaper, the Harare Herald, reported that his claims were scientifically baseless, and that the Zimbabwean Government was actively discouraging the purchase of unapproved medicines.

Zimbabwe saw some 30,000 AIDS-related deaths in 2016, with well over one million people living with HIV accounted for in the same year, according to statistics from UNAIDS; the agency working towards ending the global pandemic as a public health threat, by 2030.

Those desperate for a cure should not abandon their ARV therapy, the UN advised. Any researchers working in the field, the statement said, are urged to subject their treatments to the Zimbabwe Ministry of Health for proper clinical trials and procedures.

Until a cure is verified, effective ARV drugs can control HIV infections and help prevent transmission, “so that people with HIV, and those at substantial risk, can enjoy health, long and productive lives,” Dr. Gasasira added.

As of the end of last year, 87 percent of Zimbabweans living with HIV were aware of their status, and 74 percent of them were receiving treatment, the report states.

The United Nations is supporting Zimbabwe in its fight to stamp out HIV and AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, starting with informing citizens of their status and working to suppress infection through treatment.

Plastic-busting fungi may help tackle pollution, climate change: UN Environment

When it comes to helping green our world, organic mushrooms from the local market may be just the tip of the iceberg. A new United Nations-backed report reveals that fungi could help ween the world off its plastic addiction, by degrading polyurethane in just a matter of weeks.

According to the first-ever [State of the World's Fungi](#) report, Scientists at London's Kew Botanical Gardens reported that these organisms have the potential to break down waste plastic – an important advance in a world where momentum is building to [reverse the toxic tide](#) of plastic that is killing marine life and polluting the ocean.

Every year, at least eight million metric tonnes of plastic end up in the sea, sometimes decomposing into tiny microplastics that make their way into our food chain.

Senior Kew Gardens Scientist Ilia Leitch, said that other fungi and microorganisms are also being explored for their potential to degenerate different types of plastic, explaining that “by understanding how the fungi break down these bonds and what the optimal conditions are, you can then increase the speed at which they do it.”

In the meantime, the Kew Gardens report showcases the kind of pioneering thought that will be at the heart of the fourth UN [Environment Assembly](#) next March, on “innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production.”

Noting that there may be as many as 3.8 million fungal species, with only 144,000 named, the authors – a team of some 100 scientists from 18 countries – argue that further research into these organisms could provide answers to some of humanity's greatest challenges.

The report spells out that advances in their agricultural applications could translate into improved food security, environmental sustainability and increased production revenues.

In addition to recycling nutrients and helping crops to grow efficiently, fungi also provide compounds that produce antibiotics, immune-suppressants and statins that block cholesterol-producing liver enzyme action.

According to [UN Environment](#) (UNEP), there is [mounting evidence](#) that climate change is affecting the ranges of species and biodiversity in ways that are still not comprehensible. Fungi themselves are also under threat, particularly in high latitudes areas where average temperatures continue to rise, such as the Arctic. These changes are already affecting fungi

reproduction, geographic distributions and activity, with possible knock-on effects for our ecosystems.

“Species react differently to climate change, which disrupts the delicate interaction between them,” says Niklas Hagelberg, a UNEP climate change and ecosystems expert.

“This further complicates conservation; we need to quickly add climate change to our ecosystem management effort.”

Ahead of next year’s assembly, UNEP is urging people to “think beyond and live within,” a motto that is aimed at tackling environmental challenges and assuring a prosperous future – that may include a role for fungi, that was unthinkable just a few years ago.

[Exercise ‘utmost restraint’ in eastern Ukraine to safeguard civilian life, top UN official urges fighters on the ground](#)

After a lull in fighting in Ukraine over the summer, the last few weeks have seen a sharp rise in civilian deaths, more than half of which are due to landmines and explosive remnants of war, the United Nations top political official said on Tuesday.

“On the ground, continued and unpredictable escalations of hostilities aggravate the climate of insecurity,” UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Rosemary A. DiCarlo told the 15-member Security Council.

She said the recent so-called Harvest Ceasefire and Back to School Ceasefire – negotiated by representatives from Ukraine, Russia and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) – clearly showed that the impact of conflict on civilians could be drastically reduced with “sufficient political will and genuine commitment.”

“We continue to call upon the parties to ensure the full and immediate implementation of the ceasefire agreements and exercise utmost restraint to protect the civilian population,” she stated, urging an immediate withdrawal of heavy weapons from populated areas and protection of civilian infrastructure.

In her briefing, Ms. DiCarlo also drew attention to reports of increased tensions in the Sea of Azov and underscored the importance of the [Minsk](#)

[Agreements](#), endorsed by the Security Council, for a negotiated peace in eastern Ukraine.

“[We urge] all parties to avoid any unilateral steps that could deepen the divide or depart from of the spirit and letter of the Minsk Agreements,” she said, noting in particular the 11 November so-called “leadership” elections announced by separatists of the self-described “Donetsk people’s republic” and “Luhansk people’s republic”.

“Despite Ukraine’s objections, media report that preparations are still going ahead,” she added, recalling that the agreements address election-related matters “as part of a comprehensive package.”

“Any such measures, taken outside Ukraine’s constitutional and legal framework, would be incompatible with the Minsk Agreements,” she stressed, calling upon all parties to “recommit” to their full implementation and help usher in peace and stability to all of Ukraine.

Severe funding shortage affecting humanitarian response

Also briefing the Security Council, Ursula Mueller, the Deputy UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that over 3.5 million people across the region continue to rely on humanitarian assistance and protection.

Challenges, however, persist for relief actors, she continued, noting “unpredictable” access to areas in need as well as severe shortages of funds.

“I appeal to the donors to increase their support for consolidating these humanitarian gains, especially with Ukraine’s harsh winter fast approaching,” she said, stressing that UN agencies and humanitarian partners will continue to work to assist Ukraine’s displaced and conflict-affected people.

In late February 2014, the situation in Ukraine went from political crisis, to violent confrontation and, later became a full-scale conflict in the east, which has claimed the lives of over 3,000 civilians so far.

In April, the Russian Federation annexed and occupied the Crimean Peninsula, and according to the [UN human rights office, OHCHR](#), “continues to apply its laws in violation of international humanitarian law.”

The crisis has also engulfed the highest proportion of elderly people in the world of any conflict-zone, more than 30 per cent.

[Nigeria: Awareness-raising radio show](#)

on perils and opportunities of migration, launched by UN agency

A radio series was launched on Tuesday in Nigeria by the UN migration agency ([IOM](#)) to sensitize vulnerable people seeking to pursue economic opportunities abroad on the perils of irregular migration – migration done outside the regulated frameworks – and provide information on pathways to migrate legally and safely.

Every year, thousands of people from Nigeria and other Sub-Saharan African countries leave their families and homes in the hopes of finding work opportunities elsewhere. Many do it outside of the protected and safe international legal frameworks, which puts them at risk of trafficking, exploitation, detention without trial, sexual abuse, and other dangers such as dying at sea or in the desert.

Nigeria is the most common nationality of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea into Italy. Some 37,550 Nigerians arrived on Italian shores in 2016. Many more went missing or died.

“The idea is to create awareness through the candid testimonies of returnees who have gone through the harrowing journey both at sea and through the Sahara,” said Abraham Tamrat, who manages IOM’s migrant protection and reintegration projects in Nigeria.

“The programme will also promote social cohesion and deal with the issue of stigmatization of returned migrants,” he explained. Many returning migrants face discrimination and shame for having failed to reach their destinations and goals of a better future.

Titled “Abroad Mata”, the awareness-raising 13-episode radio series will include a radio drama titled “Waka Well” – which means “travel well” in Pidgin English – as well as testimonies from returning migrants, expert analysis, and live phone-in questions from listeners.

Through commentary from IOM staff and government officials, the show will cover key migration issues in Nigeria such as the social factors behind migration, the role of traditional and religious leaders and the role of migration information centres set up by IOM.

“The best way to take migration to the public is through radio due to its wide coverage and following,” said Charles Anaelo, who works for the Nigerian commission tasked with protecting displaced persons, including migrants, the NCFRMI.

The programme will air in Edo, Delta, Oyo, Ogun, Imo and Lagos states in Pidgin English and in Yoruba, one of Nigeria’s most spoken languages. Edo and Delta states alone account for two thirds of the returns of irregular migrants enabled by a [joint initiative by the European Union and IOM](#).

“We need to raise these issues of irregular migration and human trafficking on the radio... And we need strong narratives to drive the message,” said Arinze Orakwue, from the Nigerian agency mandated with preventing human trafficking, NAPTIP.

The radio series is a joint effort between IOM, NCFRMI, NAPTIP, and several local radio stations. It is one of the UN’s many initiatives to engage communities through mass media and other communications methods to promote social and behavioural change.

Other initiatives by the UN to support migrants and prevent related suffering include assistance for migrants to reintegrate their communities, vocational trainings and the provision of information on how to migrate safely.

[Weekly migration of 1.4m to cities can contribute to ‘disasters’](#)

The migration of some 1.4 million people every week to cities around the world “can strain local capacities, contributing to increased risk from natural and human made disasters” according to the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

In his message for [World Cities Day](#), celebrated annually on 31 October, Mr. Guterres stressed that “hazards do not need to become disasters.”

“The answer is to build resilience – to storms, floods, earthquakes, fires, pandemics and economic crises,” he said.

Mr. Guterres explained that cities around the world are doing just that, forging new ways to increase resilience and sustainability.

The capital of Thailand, Bangkok has built vast underground water storage facilities to cope with increased flood risk and save water for drier periods.

In Quito, the capital of Ecuador in South America, local government has reclaimed or protected more than 200,000 hectares of land to boost flood protection, reduce erosion and safeguard the city’s freshwater supply and biodiversity.

The UN chief also indicated that the city of Johannesburg in South Africa “is involving residents in efforts to improve public spaces so they can be safely used for recreation, sports, community events and services such as free medical care.”

Risks

World Cities Day was established by the UN to promote the international community's interest in global urbanization, push forward cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization, and contributing to sustainable urban development around the world.

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme ([UN Habitat](#)), [flagged](#) the importance of investing in resilience or face growing "economic, social, political and human" risks.

"It has been estimated that without action on climate change – which accounts for just one facet of resilience – some 77 million urban residents risk falling into poverty," she warned, elaborating that human-made and environmental threats ranged from droughts, floods and fires to economic shocks, disease outbreaks, war and migration.

"Investing in resilience is a wise investment," the UN Habitat chief said.

The theme of this year's commemoration, [Building Sustainable and Resilient Cities](#), focuses on the need to preserve human life and limit damage and destruction while continuing to provide infrastructure and services after a crisis.

A range of UN-backed international agreements, including the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) and the [New Urban Agenda](#) provide "a roadmap for a more sustainable and resilient world," according to the UN Secretary-General.