

West and Central Africa lagging far behind world in HIV response, warns UNICEF

5 December 2017 – Four in five children living with HIV in West and Central Africa are still not receiving life-saving antiretroviral therapy and AIDS-related deaths among adolescents aged 15-19 are on the rise, the United Nations Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) has warned.

It is [tragic that so many children and adolescents today are not receiving the treatment they need](#) just because they have not been tested, said Marie-Pierre Poirier, the UNICEF Director for the region, in a news release, Tuesday, calling for improvement of early diagnosis and access to HIV treatment and care for children.

According to UNICEF, West and Central Africa has the lowest paediatric antiretroviral treatment coverage in the world, with only 21 per cent of the 540,000 children (aged 0-14) living with HIV receiving antiretroviral treatment in 2016 compared to 43 per cent globally.

A major cause behind this is the limited capacity of the countries to perform the tests needed for early infant diagnosis of HIV.

Without knowing a child's HIV status, his or her family is less likely to seek the treatment that could prevent the tragedy of a child's death from AIDS-related illnesses, said UNICEF.

The situation is worse among adolescents: the annual number of new HIV infections among those aged 15-19 years in the region now exceeds that of children aged 0-14 years. These new infections occur mostly through unprotected sexual contact and among adolescent girls.

Without knowing a child's HIV status, his or her family is less likely to seek the treatment that could prevent the tragedy of a child's death from AIDS-related illnesses UNICEF

Equally concerning, according to [Step Up the Pace: Towards an AIDS-free](#), a recently released UNICEF report, is that the region has seen a 35 per cent rise in the annual number of AIDS-related deaths among adolescents aged 15-19 years the only age group in which the number of AIDS-related deaths increased between 2010 and 2016.

With the region's youth population expected to grow significantly within the coming decades, especially in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Nigeria, the numbers of children and adolescents becoming infected with HIV and dying from AIDS is likely to remain high, unless the HIV response both prevention and treatment improves

dramatically, the report warns.

To overcome these hurdles, the report calls for key strategies to enable countries accelerate efforts to curb the spread of disease.

In particular, it proposes a differentiated HIV response focusing on unique epidemiological and local contexts in each country and community; integration of HIV services into key social services including health, education and protection; community ownership and local governance of the HIV response including working with families to help reduce stigma, access prevention and treatment; and investment in innovations to remove barriers to diagnostic and biomedical approaches such as point of care diagnostics, HIV self-testing and pre-exposure prophylaxis.

Leaders of the region have endorsed a Catch-Up plan aiming to triple the number of people on treatment in the region including children by the end of 2018, the key issue now is to accelerate implementation, said Luiz Loures, the Deputy Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS ([UNAIDS](#)).

Countries should urgently put in place more effective strategies for early infant diagnosis of HIV, and start reducing inequity in children's access to treatment.

[Iraq: Ambiguity over legal age of marriage could devastate childhoods, warn UN officials](#)

4 December 2017 – Voicing concern over proposed amendments to laws governing marriage in Iraq – in particular the ambiguity over the legal age of marriage – senior United Nations officials called on the country to ensure adequate protection for children across Iraq.

“It is a matter of concern that these draft amendments are silent on the minimum age of consent to marriage and do not apply to all components of Iraqi society,” said Representatives of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, and for Children and Armed Conflict, Virginia Gamba, in a [statement](#), the Iraqi Council of Representative's approval in principle of the draft law – that does not explicitly set the minimum age of marriage to 18-years for both women and men – represents a significant step back from commitments to prevent and address sexual violence.

The two UN senior officials also raised fears of increase in divisions within the country at a time when Iraq is recovering from the conflict with the

Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL or Da'esh).

They also cautioned that the proposed amendments could lead to possible breaches of Iraq's legally binding commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

"My Office was repeatedly assured by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and the Speaker of the Council of Representatives Salim al-Jabouri that the fulfilment of each of the pillars of the Joint Communiqué are essential to Iraq's post-Da'esh reconstruction," Ms. Patten stated.

A key pillar of the Joint Communiqué (signed by the Iraqi Foreign Minister with the UN, formally committing to prevent and address conflict-related sexual violence) is to 'support legislative and policy reform to strengthen protection from and service response to sexual violence crimes.

Noting that the boys and girls of Iraq, already victims of grave violations resulting from years of conflict with Da'esh, are now "at risk of being deprived of their childhood," Ms. Gamba called on the Government to "take all necessary actions to protect every child by preventing the adoption of policies that can harm children already exposed to armed conflict."

SRSR Patten and Gamba concluded by strongly "urging the Government of Iraq to reconsider these proposed amendments to the Personal Status Law" and reaffirming their commitment "to stand with both the Government and people of Iraq to ensure that the scourge of sexual violence is eliminated and that children affected by armed conflict are protected."

[Central African Republic: UN chief condemns killing of 'blue helmet' in country's east](#)

4 December 2017 – [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres has condemned the killing today of a Mauritanian peacekeeper and the wounding of three others of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic ([MINUSCA](#)) by anti-Balaka militia in Bria in the country's east.

According to a [statement](#) issued by a UN spokesperson, the attack occurred at a checkpoint staffed by MINUSCA peacekeepers near an internally displaced persons site in the town.

This brings to 14 the number of peacekeepers killed in targeted attacks in the Central African Republic since January 2017.

“The Secretary-General offers his deepest condolences and sympathy to the family of the victim and to the Government of Mauritania. He wishes a swift recovery to the injured,” said the statement.

Through the statement, Mr. Guterres recalled that attacks against UN peacekeepers may constitute a war crime. He urged the Central African authorities to swiftly investigate this incident and bring the perpetrators to justice.

“The Secretary-General reiterates the determination of MINUSCA to protect civilians and contribute to the stabilization of the Central African Republic,” the statement said, adding that the UN chief urged all parties to cease violence and work together to bring peace and stability to the country.

Clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka rebel coalition and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian, plunged the country of 4.5 million people into civil conflict in 2013.

[UN chief proposes ‘sweeping’ management reform to budget committee](#)

4 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Monday proposed sweeping management reform to Member States in the General Assembly’s main administrative and budgetary body, including the adoption of an annual budget cycle, the granting of the power for him to redeploy resources within the approved budget, and the elimination of duplicate functions currently undertaken by different departments.

“Reform is not an end in itself. The purpose of reform is simple and clear: to [best position](#) the United Nations to do the work that Member States ask us to do,” said Mr. Guterres in his remarks to the [Fifth Committee](#).

He said that his reports to the General Assembly outlined reform of the peace and security architecture, development system reform and management reform aimed at simplifying procedures and decentralizing decisions, with greater transparency, efficiency, agility and accountability.

Elaborating on the management reform, Mr. Guterres proposed moving from a biennial to an annual budget, and shortening the planning and budgetary cycle from five to three years.

He also asked Member States’ support to grant him additional authority to redeploy resources up to 20 per cent of a section within the budget parts, not between parts. This would enable the UN Secretariat to better respond to changing demands while preserving the principle that resources allocated for particular pillars of the Organization should be used for those pillars.

The UN chief also proposed that the scope of the commitment authority for “unforeseen and extraordinary expenses” be broadened to cover unforeseen events in the areas of development and human rights, beyond peace and security.

As for the duplicative functions undertaken by different departments, he proposed establishing a Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance with a clear policy, strategy and compliance role, which will be complemented by a Department of Operational Support focusing on operations, services, transactions and surge support to entities in weak environments.

Regarding the Umoja enterprise resource planning system and the global service delivery model, he proposed that these functions be carried out in two or three centres and to undertake a strategic assessment of locations.

He also proposed streamlining and simplifying human resources rules, processes and procedures to ensure timely recruitment, deployment and staff development.

Mr. Guterres stressed that achieving gender parity and increasing geographical diversity are important aspects of his reforms.

He said within his Executive Office, gender parity has been achieved in professional position while geographical diversity has also been substantially increased.

“This shows that the two goals are not mutually exclusive but reinforcing. It also shows what I am able to do with greater managerial authority,” he said.

[UN chief urges universal ratification of International Criminal Court's founding treaty](#)

4 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Monday stressed the importance of all States ratifying the treaty that established the International Criminal Court as the central institution of the global criminal justice system, known as the Rome Statute.

“To ensure accountability around the world, it is essential to reach [universal ratification](#) of the Rome Statute,” said Mr. Guterres at the opening in New York of the 16th session of the Assembly of States Parties to the treaty, whose adoption in 1998, he said, was “a hopeful, historic moment near the end of a century marked by atrocities and unspeakable inhumanity.”

“I invite all State parties to support any effort to achieve this goal,” he

added.

According to ICC, 123 countries are [States Parties](#) to the Statute –33 African States, 19 Asia-Pacific States, 18 Eastern European States, 28 Latin American and Caribbean States, and 25 Western European and other States.

The UN chief noted that nearly 20 years after the signature of its founding instrument, the Court has become a fundamental pillar of the rule of law in the world.

The Court has helped investigate and secure convictions in important cases, such as the use of child soldiers, or of sexual violence as a tactic of war, and also attacks on cultural property, while helping many State Parties reinforce their domestic criminal justice systems, he added.

Mr. Guterres also stressed that “the ICC was created as a court of last resort” and States Parties have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute the serious crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

“The United Nations supports State Parties, at their request, to develop domestic capacities to uphold this obligation,” he said.

He explained that how essential it is to reach universal ratification of the Statute to ensure accountability when States Parties fall short of fulfilling the obligation.

Mr. Guterres welcomed the decisions of South Africa and The Gambia to rescind their notifications of withdrawal, but expressed his regret over Burundi’s decision to withdraw from the Statute.

He also said that achieving justice also means assisting victims, noting that the Trust Fund for Victims is now engaged in reparations and is supporting efforts to address the harm caused by the international crimes covered by the Statute.

At today’s meeting, ICC President Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi and Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda presented an annual [report](#) on the institution’s activities to the Assembly of States Parties. The session runs through 14 December at UN Headquarters in New York.