

AIDS in Africa: Who will act?

by Dana S. Scanlon

An apocalypse is unfolding in Africa, and not a single Western government or international agency has proposed any kind of emergency program to deal with it. Six million African adults and 900,000 children are, according to the conservative estimates of the World Health Organization (WHO), presently infected with the AIDS-producing virus HIV. Already, over 800,000 adults and 500,000 children have the full-blown symptoms of AIDS. In many African countries the infection rate is doubling every year, meaning that within a few years those regions will be reduced to deserts inhabited by a few nomadic tribes.

Africa has long been targeted by agencies such as the U.S. National Security Council, various United Nations groups, and the international population control establishment as "overpopulated" and in need of drastic measures to curb population growth. This patently absurd assertion is repeated almost daily in newspapers around the globe and in speeches by world leaders. Yet Africa as a whole has one of the lowest population densities of any part of the world.

Planning for death

Far from mobilizing to save lives, malthusian planners are cold-bloodedly calculating how to deal with the *economic impact* of mass deaths among black Africans. The June 1991 issue of the South African military magazine *Armed Forces*, for example, contained extensive discussion of how to run the mining industries of southern Africa with less and less labor power.

Under the headline "AIDS and the Strategic Implications," the author, writing under the name "Krieger," states that "of all the nations of Africa, we are the only one with the know-how, the infrastructure, and the funds to take on AIDS and come out, if not as a winner, then certainly a survivor in reasonable shape. . . . By the end of the decade it is possible that 60% or more of the work force will be dead or sick, with new infections continue to appear. . . . There will be a massive loss of black consumer buying-power, with resultant ill-effects for the economy. . . . South Africa's trade with the rest of Africa will be badly affected by those states' AIDS-induced economic collapse. . . . New export markets must be found to replace Africa—perhaps Red China, parts of Latin America, and other countries which will be less affected by AIDS."

A continent of orphans

According to information compiled primarily in the June-July 1991 issue of *South* magazine, the following is the situation in various African nations:

- Uganda is by far the worst affected country at this time. Twenty-two thousand Ugandans already have AIDS. The AIDS Control Program (ACP) estimates that 1.3 million of the country's 17 million people are HIV-positive, and that the number of AIDS cases doubles every six months. A recent population projection given to the Ugandan President estimates that the predicted population for the year 2010 should be revised downward from 37 million to 20 million, because of the death toll from AIDS. In the Rakai District around Lake Victoria, where HIV seems to be more widespread than any other region of Africa, more than 2,000 parents have died since 1977, out of a present-day population of 30,000. In that district, AIDS has three names: *mukenena* (the one that drains), *lukonvuba* (incurable disease), and *mubbi* (the robber). In many cases an elderly person may be trying to look after 10 orphans. Households are finding themselves increasingly short of labor for the farm, and have to take children out of school, or abandon the more labor-intensive crops, because of the death rate.

- Zaire has one of the highest infection rates: 12,000 now have AIDS. AIDS "control" programs have focused largely on dispensing condoms, whose use has increased from 200,000 in 1986 to 9 million in 1990.

- Zimbabwe's Health Ministry recently warned that about 29% of the country's active work force could be HIV-positive. The number of AIDS cases has risen dramatically from 119 in 1987 to almost 6,000 at the end of 1990. Six hundred and forty-two people were diagnosed as being infected with HIV during the first quarter of this year alone, according to the Harare-based AIDS Counseling Trust. The chairman of the Federation of Master Printers, Ellis Smith, has issued a call for more apprentices to be recruited in the printing industry in order to replace those who are going to die of AIDS. Smith made the following chilling prediction to a general meeting of his federation: "At present AIDS-infected people represent 4% of the population. This percentage is going to increase to perhaps 25% or even 30% by the year 2000."

- In Ivory Coast, AIDS is now the number-one cause of death among men and the number-two cause among women.

- In South Africa, some estimate that 100,000 South Africans, of all colors, are now infected with the HIV virus, and the number is expected to double within a year. Theo Hartwig, chief actuary of the Old Mutual Insurance Group predicts that South Africa's population growth will have ceased by the turn of the century because of AIDS. By 1995, about 10% of the working population will be infected with the AIDS virus; 30,000 will be ill and 25,000 will die during that year. By 1998, he calculates, 40% will be infected, 175,000 will be ill and 130,000 will die.