

AIDS Pandemic Threatens Africa with Extinction

by Colin Lowry

Two new reports released prior to the July 9-14 Thirteenth International AIDS Conference in Durban, South Africa, show that the rapid spread of AIDS, and the impending deaths of up to half the population in some African countries, is creating a catastrophe that may surpass the "Black Death" of the 14th century. Previous official reports as recent as the CIA's, completed in February, have continued to underestimate the severity of the epidemic. The UNAIDS Report on the Global HIV/AIDS Epidemic, and studies by the U.S. Census Bureau, provide new estimates of even higher HIV infection rates, lower life expectancy, and more deaths due to AIDS.

The situation is now so desperate, that the question of debt cancellation for developing countries suffering from the effects of AIDS has been raised by the Executive Director of UNAIDS. In his opening speech to the 13th International AIDS Conference, Dr. Peter Piot said, "Let's not forget that each year African countries are paying \$15 billion in debt repayments—that's four times more than they spend on health or education. We call on governments in the North and the international financial institutions to cancel the debts. Now." The statement by Piot is certain to ruffle the feathers of officials of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. But, what about prevention and treatment of AIDS in Africa? UNAIDS says that it would cost \$3 billion a year for the most basic prevention and care for Africa alone, which is ten times more than what is being spent today. While the UNAIDS proposal is in the right direction, it does not address the lack of public health and medical infrastructure that would be needed to fight the epidemic.

'We Are Threatened with Extinction'

According to UNAIDS' new estimates, 34.3 million people worldwide are infected by HIV, and 2.8 million died of AIDS in 1999. In the countries of southern Africa, HIV infection rates range from 20% in South Africa, to 26% in Zimbabwe, and 36% in Botswana, the highest in the world. The average for this region that includes nine countries, is

now 20% of the total population. As staggering as these figures are, the real impact on the population is much worse. From these HIV incidence rates, UNAIDS calculates the increased probability that a person who is now 15 years old will die before reaching the age of 50. For a country such as South Africa, where the HIV incidence rate is 20%, a 15-year-old has only a 50% chance of surviving to age 50. In any country with HIV incidence rates of 15%, the likelihood is that one-third of the 15-year-olds alive today will die before age 50. In the case of Botswana, where 36% of the adult population is already infected, 70-85% of the 15-year-olds alive today will die before age 50.

Botswana President Festus Mogae told the conference, "We really are in a national crisis. We are threatened with extinction. People are dying in chillingly high numbers. We are losing the best of our young people."

The speed of the epidemic's spread has been shocking to many health experts. Consider South Africa, where there are now 4.2 million people who are HIV-infected. From surveillance data obtained from tests in antenatal clinics, in 1990 only at most 1% of patients were found to be HIV-infected. In 1999, 19.9% of antenatal patients were HIV positive. In Nigeria, which currently has the highest number of HIV infections in West Africa, at 2.7 million, the epidemic has exploded in the past ten years. In 1990, only 1% of women at antenatal clinics tested positive for HIV, and in 1999, up to 8% were infected.

Women now represent the majority of AIDS cases in Africa, with the bulk of new infections occurring in young women 15-25 years of age. With half the population expected to be wiped out in 20 years, the prospects for the next generation are just as grim. Infant mortality has increased by 15% since 1986 in Zambia, and 20% in Kenya, due mostly to the impact of AIDS. In Zimbabwe, 40% of pregnant women are HIV-infected according to studies from antenatal clinics. In Kenya, 21% of pregnant girls 15-19 years old are HIV-positive. Women of child-bearing age are dying at increasing rates, such as in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, where AIDS is responsible for 48% of women's deaths.

Life expectancy, which had slowly been increasing until the early 1980s, has now been slashed by 30 years or more, in most of Sub-Saharan Africa, due to AIDS. In Zimbabwe, without AIDS, life expectancy would have been 69 years, but is now only 39 due to the epidemic. In Botswana, life expectancy is projected to be only about 30 years for a child born today. Stanecki told the conference, that life expectancy in Africa is now at "a level that has probably not been seen since the start of the 20th century." For the first time, AIDS will cause negative population growth for South Africa, Botswana, and Zimbabwe, with a decline of between 1 and 3% by 2003. No disease has caused negative population growth of a nation since the bubonic plague of the 14th century, which killed 25 million Europeans. It took more

than 150 years for the population of Europe to recover to levels that existed before the plague.

AIDS Orphans

One of the most destructive impacts of the AIDS epidemic upon children in Africa, is the loss of one or both parents. There are currently 13.2 million orphans due to AIDS worldwide, with about 95% living in Africa. In many countries in Africa, 7-11% of all children are AIDS orphans. In Zimbabwe, which has only 12 million total population, UNAIDS estimates that there will be 1.1 million AIDS orphans by 2005. Some of these orphans are cared for by grandparents and extended family, but often there is no family left, so they end up on the streets in the cities. About half of AIDS orphans do not get even primary school education. In Zimbabwe, a study of secondary school students whose parents died of AIDS, found that none of these children returned to school, most having left to find some kind of work. UNAIDS projects that there will be 42 million AIDS orphans worldwide within a decade.

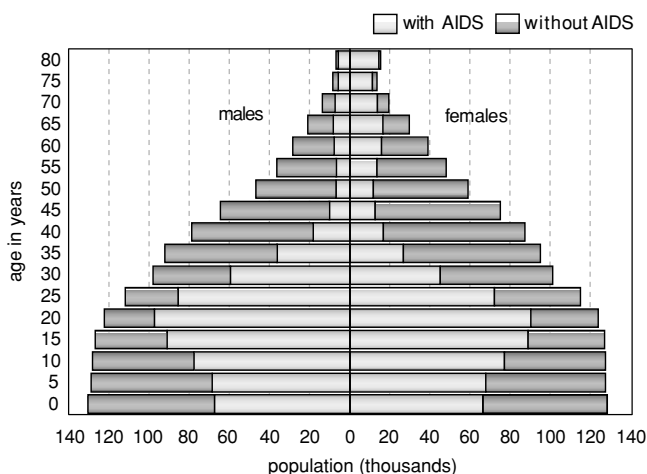
For the lucky children who are in school in Africa now, what will happen as more and more teachers and professionals die? In Mozambique, 30% of the teachers are HIV-positive. In Zambia, 1,300 teachers died of AIDS in the first ten months of 1998, which is about two-thirds of the number of teachers trained each year. In the Central African Republic, AIDS has reduced the number of teachers in primary school to one-third below what is required. Between 1996 and 1998, as many teachers died as retired. Due to the losses of staff, 107 schools closed, and only 66 remained open.

Workforce Wiped Out

Along with the UNAIDS report, the International Labor Organization has issued a study examining the impact of the AIDS epidemic on the workforce. The report forecasts a catastrophic loss of 61 million people from the workforce due to death or sickness from AIDS by 2015. This would be accompanied by drops in economic output of at least 25%. Projections for South Africa for 2020 are that 17% of the workforce will be eliminated, with a heavy impact on companies with experienced and highly skilled employees who will be difficult to replace. In many countries in Africa, companies are hiring and training two or three employees for one job, expecting only one to survive.

The agricultural sector has already been hit hard by the epidemic in Africa. Families that rely on subsistence farming are especially devastated by the loss of young adults. Women of farming families who have lost their husband to AIDS lose, on average, 60% of their farming income. While subsistence farming may only produce 20% of the GDP in some countries, it is the livelihood of as much as 80% of the population in Southern Africa. In Zimbabwe, the output of communal farming has fallen by 50% over the past five

FIGURE 1
Project Population Structure With and Without the AIDS Epidemic, Botswana, 2020



Source: US Census Bureau, World Population Profile 2000

years, in large part because of the deaths due to AIDS. Production of corn and cotton has fallen by 54% and 47%, respectively, over the same period. In Kenya, many sugar companies have suffered a 50% drop in productivity during 1993-97 due to loss of workers and increased expenses.

The loss of so much of the adult population and its effect on the workforce at the level that is now emerging, has never been seen before in history. The impact of the AIDS epidemic in the most severely affected countries will create a population structure that could not be created by the effects of war. The Census Bureau has generated detailed analysis of the projected population structure of Botswana in 2020 due to the epidemic, in which there will be more adults in their 60s and 70s than those in their 40s and 50s. The population structure, which normally would look like a pyramid, now resembles a chimney (see **Figure 1**). There are not enough young people below the age of 10 to replace the aging adult population of survivors. The “missing adults,” who would be in their 30s to 50s, have died off as a result of the AIDS epidemic. This would result in complete economic devastation, as there are not enough young adults in the workforce to support the old and the very young. The Census Report states, “What this means for society is hard to predict, since the world has never before experienced death rates of this magnitude among young adults of both sexes across all social strata.” But we are already seeing what this means in Africa—a Dark Age worse than what engulfed Europe in the 14th century.

Poverty and AIDS

South African President Thabo Mbeki has been slandered by the press around the world for insisting that poverty and its relationship to the spread of AIDS be discussed. In his address to the conference, he said, "The world's biggest killer and the greatest cause of ill-health and suffering across the globe, including South Africa, is extreme poverty." In bringing up the need for building real public health and medical infrastructure in Africa, he has hit upon exactly the questions that the IMF, World Bank, and many governments don't want to deal with. This epidemic will never be solved by throwing condoms into areas that have no hospitals, clinics, clean water, or nutrition sufficient to support the population. Only an approach that includes real infrastructure-building and development, combined with training of medical personnel and intense biological research, will turn the tide against the epidemic.

So far, most of the official responses from UNAIDS and the U.S. government to the AIDS epidemic have been woefully inadequate. The Clinton Administration has asked for a mere \$250 million to fund anti-AIDS efforts overseas for the 2000 budget. The flurry of media coverage and the release of multiple reports in the last four months about the unexpected severity of the epidemic, would lead one to believe that somehow everyone just now discovered that AIDS is a global threat. The fact is, that warnings and forecasts were made more than a decade ago by Lyndon LaRouche, which have been proven accurate.

In 1988, as part of his Presidential campaign, LaRouche went on nationwide television outlining a program of massive medical infrastructure-building and a crash research effort to combat AIDS, which he warned would become a threat to the very existence of nations, just like the Black Death of the 14th century. Also in 1988, *EIR* produced a detailed report analyzing the spread of the AIDS epidemic, and warned that measures needed to be adopted immediately to avert a catastrophe that would first erupt in Africa. The report was sent to the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, which responded officially that AIDS "represented no such threat." Why were the warnings made more than a decade ago ignored, and why has the acknowledgment of the severity of the crisis taken so long? Helene Gayle, Director of AIDS Prevention at the CDC, was quoted by the *Washington Post*, saying, "We saw it coming, and we didn't act as quickly as we could have. I'm not sure what that says about how seriously we took it, how seriously we took lives in Africa."

Perhaps President Mbeki has part of the answer as to why the AIDS epidemic has been viewed without urgency by most of the industrialized nations. Addressing the International AIDS Conference and referring to Africans, he said, "They die largely because of world indifference, but most of all they die because they are poor."

Italian Parliament Readies Debt Moratorium

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

On June 23, Lyndon LaRouche was the guest speaker at a conference organized in Rome, by Italian Member of Parliament Hon. Giovanni Bianchi, on the proposal for a New Bretton Woods conference (see *EIR*, July 7, 2000, p. 12). While the American economist and candidate for the U.S. Democratic Presidential nomination, was presenting his proposed monetary reform to a group of political leaders, industrialists, intellectuals, and press, in the Cenacolo Hall of the Parliament, his host, Bianchi, was forced to be absent; the reason was that he, a Deputy of the Italian Popular Party (PPI), was himself engaged in presenting a bill to the Parliament, on a debt moratorium for the most highly indebted countries of the developing sector. Happily, Bianchi's bill was passed unanimously by the Chamber of Deputies on June 28, and is expected to be approved as well by the Senate.

That the two events—LaRouche's public appearance and the debate on the bill—were connected, was more than coincidental; in fact, LaRouche has been the inspiration for a series of extraordinary steps taken over recent months by the Italian Parliament. Among them, are the Senate's resolution for a New Bretton Woods conference to set up a new global financial system, followed by its presentation by Italian members of the European Parliament, to that body; and, a parliamentary inquiry, addressed to the government, regarding the reported violations of human rights by the Democratic Party's obstruction of LaRouche's political campaign in the United States.

The intense discussion of Bianchi's bill on debt moratorium, and the ongoing debate on the New Bretton Woods in Italy's political institutions, demonstrate a high level of political culture in the country, reflected in LaRouche's influence over decades.

The bill presented by Bianchi is known as the decree on "Measures for the reduction of foreign debt for countries with the lowest income and the highest foreign debt." If the Senate, as expected, also approves the initiative, the government will then be called upon to act.

The bill says that Italy will cancel foreign debts for a total of \$6 billion over three years, affecting about 62 developing countries, 41 Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC's), and all the other nations which are eligible to