

INTERNATIONAL

Survey: AIDS to effect Africa's population

By Farhan Haq
Special to Sentinel-Voice
UNITED NATIONS (IPS) — The AIDS epidemic is dramatically reducing life expectancy throughout sub-Saharan Africa and will also cut the populations of many African countries within the next 10 to 15 years, says a new UN statistical survey.

The biennial revision of world population, released Oct. 28 by the U. Department of Economic and Social Affairs' Population Division, estimates that in the nine worst-hit African countries, life expectancy rates will average 47 years between

2010 and 2015. Without the AIDS epidemic, life expectancies in those countries would have been projected at 64 years, the report said.

The growing number of AIDS-related deaths will also have a much more dramatic effect in decreasing fertility and reducing population growth throughout Africa than was initially believed, said Joseph Chamie, director of the population division.

The United Nations is revising population estimates for many of the worst-hit countries sharply downward in light of the effect of the

epidemic.

By 2015, South Africa is projected to carry a population of 43.3 million people — or about nine million fewer people than had been estimated if there were no AIDS epidemic. Zimbabwe's population for 2015 is now projected to be only 13.6 million people, or 3.2 million people fewer than had been estimated before accounting for AIDS.

Despite such declines, the UN survey predicts that overall growth rates in Africa, and even in the countries most affected by AIDS, will continue to rise slightly.

"Even in the worst cases, the toll of AIDS is not expected to lead to declines of populations, because fertility in these countries is high," the report says.

The population of Botswana — with one of the highest levels of HIV infection — is still expected to double between 1995 and 2050, although its population growth will be about 23 percent less than otherwise expected.

Chamie said that South Africa's estimated growth rate with AIDS is a low, but still positive, 0.3 percent. (See AIDS, Page 16)

Red tape could hurt voter registration in South Africa

By Pat Reber
JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — Standing in lines that snake through government offices, South Africans are fighting red tape for the right to vote next year.

At the main office here, several have lost the battle with bureaucracy and have been sent home because they lacked the proper documents or the correct number of photos.

The government plans to create the first national voters roll by registering 25 million people in three days. The process began Friday.

To register, people must use bar-coded identification books introduced in 1986 to gradually replace the older versions. But millions of voters lack the documents.

Given the long lines and confusion about the process, it is unlikely that many of

them will have the proper identification, or a special receipt saying they applied for one in time.

The problems with bar-coded identification books could have political consequences. Fewer whites, the bulwark support of opposition parties, have the proper documents than blacks, which could mean a boon for the governing African National Congress.

During 1994's all-race elections, which ended apartheid, voters only needed to show up on election day with any identification and at any polling place. Registration was scrapped to reduce tension before the historic vote.

Requiring the bar-coded identification to register was the brainchild of the Independent Electoral Commission, which since has tried to reverse the plan after

learning about the backlogs.

But the ANC government believes the backlogs are not that bad and has stuck by the idea, inviting criticism that it wants to exclude white voters.

More than 80 percent of blacks have the bar-coded documents, compared with 65 percent of whites.

It was more in the interest of blacks to obtain them. As apartheid was ending, many rushed to obtain the bar-coded identification to replace their apartheid-era documents.

Now, record numbers of people are lining up for new identification documents, up 60 percent over last year, said Home Affairs spokesman Manafe Makewla.

That doesn't mean they get them.

A dejected Edwin Rasekwere, 40, who is black, was told at the Home Affairs window he needed a birth certificate from a magistrate's

court.

"Maybe I'm going to spend the whole day there," he said.

Gary Gilmore, 46, a white South African, was turned away because he didn't have enough photographs.

"So now I have to decide if I want to come back into this line," he said. "And that will depend on my workload next week."

WORLD BRIEFS

SIERRE LEONE'S EX-PRESIDENT GETS LIFE FOR TREASON

FREETOWN (IPS) — Sierra Leone's ex-president Joseph Momoh began serving a life sentence in prison last week after being found guilty of treason. "I was a victim of circumstances," Momoh said shortly before his sentencing by Sierra Leone's high court judge, Sydney Warne. "As author and signatory of the 1991 constitution (which the current government is using), I cannot see myself conspiring or endeavoring to usurp executive powers," he said. Momoh, who ruled the West African country from 1985 to 1992, was one of the 21 civilians who were tried for supporting the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council which ruled Sierra Leone from May 1997 to February 1998. Fifteen civilians, including the AFRC's Attorney General Ajibola Manley-Spaine, were found guilty and sentenced to death for treason. They have 21 days from the Nov. 6 sentencing to appeal their convictions.

ILLEGAL TAX BREAKS COSTING MADAGASCAR MILLIONS

ANTANANARIVO (IPS) — Despite the government's efforts to crack down on tax evasion, Madagascar has lost more than \$44 million from January to October due to illicit deals between businesses and state officials. "It's really an enormous loss, but that's the reality and we have to talk about it and publish the list of fraudsters so as to clean up the fiscal sector," Deputy Prime Minister Pierrot Rajaonarivelo said in a news conference. Rajaonarivelo, who is responsible for budgetary affairs and the development of autonomous provinces, said the government issued an order June 15 banning state officials from giving any irregular tax breaks. However, some have continued to give exemptions to businesses that are not among the 2,213 firms on the official list of firms exempted from customs duties. Moreover, 380 of those on the list have expired licenses. "Since government officials are involved in this affair of illegal exemptions, they will receive the punishment they deserve, but their status and rights must first be taken into account, and the sanctions will be heavy," he said.

Zimbabwe unions to look into government's farm seizures

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Trade unions vowed Saturday to study the proposed seizure of 800 white-owned farms in Zimbabwe, expressing concerns that the move could leave 60,000 black farm workers without jobs.

The government announced the plan last week as a way of resettling thousands of landless blacks on the white farms.

But Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, said he fears that blacks now working those farms could be hurt under the plan.

He said the organization doesn't oppose land reforms in general, but said he wanted to hear more about the takeover plans.

Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe's intended land seizure is seen as an attempt to cultivate support at a time when unrest over soaring prices and government corruption present a serious threat to his 18-year rule.

The president and his family left Friday on an unannounced 16-day trip to Egypt, Libya, France, Italy and Britain.

The trade union organization has staged two one-day strikes this month. It wants the government to give more power to the legislature, reduce the number of Cabinet ministers and refund millions of dollars politicians allegedly stole from housing and pension funds.

Tsvangirai said the unions would also demand an account of the cost of sending 8,000 Zimbabwean troops to support Congolese President Laurent Kabila, who is fighting a rebel movement.

The labor leader also called on the government to agree to a social contract to address poverty.

The United Nations says 60 percent of Zimbabwe's 12.7 million people live below the poverty line.

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