

## INTERNATIONAL

## UNICEF: AIDS Africa's toughest foe

LUSAKA, Zambia (AP) — AIDS, not war, has turned Africa into a "killing field" and will wipe out enough adults to create 13 million orphans in the next 18 months, the United Nations children's agency said last week.

Such cataclysmic statements at the 11th international AIDS in Africa conference were aimed at prodding African governments — which spend more on defense than on health — to act against the scourge of the continent.

Africa is home to two-thirds of the world's 31 million HIV-infected people. Last year, AIDS killed 2 million Africans, outstripping deaths from armed conflicts on the continent 10-1, said the children's fund, called UNICEF.

In 15 years, AIDS has killed 11 million Africans, more than 80 percent of the world's AIDS deaths.

"By any measure, the HIV-AIDS pandemic is the most terrible undeclared war in the world, with the whole of sub-Saharan Africa a killing field," UNICEF executive director Carol

Bellamy said on the conference's third day.

Ninety percent of the world's AIDS orphans live in Africa, and most suffer "alarmingly higher rates of malnutrition, stunting and illiteracy", UNICEF said. They often die of neglect and are victimized by the stigma surrounding the disease.

UNICEF's figures come from UNAIDS, a Geneva-based organization of epidemiologists and statisticians who study AIDS.

Jim Carmichael, a UNAIDS representative in New York, said the group estimates how many children will become orphans based on anonymous HIV testing of pregnant women at prenatal clinics.

Then the group looks at whether the rates of HIV in that country are staying stable, increasing or decreasing, he said.

"In most places it's stable or increasing. There are very few places that it's decreasing," he said. The number of child-headed households is rising sharply, the UNICEF report said.

In many southern African

nations up to 25 percent of adults are infected with the AIDS virus — the highest prevalence in the world. In Zambia alone, 90,000 AIDS orphans have been left to fend for themselves on the streets.

Bellamy said decades of gains for child survival and development are being wiped out by the disease.

Lack of AIDS education is part of the problem, the group said.

More than a quarter of adolescent women south of the Sahara — the group most at risk from infection with the HIV virus that causes AIDS — were unaware of any effective way of avoiding the disease, research has shown. In southern Africa, more than 30 percent of young women felt a healthy-looking person could not be a carrier.

The threat has been worsened, Bellamy said, by the lack of commitment from political leaders to fight AIDS. It amounts to a "conspiracy of silence" to hide the seriousness of the crisis from ordinary people, she said.

The United States spends \$880 million fighting about

40,000 new AIDS cases a year. All of Africa spends about \$150 million fighting 4 million new cases a year, and only one-tenth of the expenditure comes from governments, Bellamy said.

She said African governments must mobilize community education as a top priority. She called for them to set goals for the year 2002, including:

— making adolescent women aware of how to protect themselves.

— giving up to 70 percent of pregnant women access to voluntary and confidential testing.

— encouraging HIV-positive mothers to seek treatment to block mother-to-child transmission.

— making sure local governments can provide food, education and basic health care for the 13 million AIDS orphans.

"We can achieve these goals only with the sustained support of officials at the highest level," Bellamy said.

Speakers also touched on a related topic: sexual exploitation of children.

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## South Africa dominates Africa Games

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — South Africa won the most gold medals at the All Africa Games, boosting its chances of holding the World Cup, Olympics and other major international events.

Despite some organizational and crime problems, among those who gave high marks to the host country's handling of the continent's premier sports event were International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch and Nigerian Sports Minister Damishi Sango.

Sango said South Africa has shown it is ready to host the 2006 soccer World Cup. South Africa is considered one of the favorites to hold the event.

South African Joshua Peterson won the men's marathon in 2:19:07 on Sunday, adding his gold to the 174 medals, including 67 gold, that South Africa had already won by Saturday night.

## Peacekeepers recommended in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone (AP) — Sierra Leone remains too unstable to start repatriating refugees, a U.N. official said Saturday, warning that international peacekeepers are urgently needed to maintain the West African nation's fragile peace.

An accord signed by the government and rebel United Revolutionary Front in July includes plans for the return of an estimated 500,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, most of whom fled to neighboring Guinea and Liberia. But refugees haven't started coming home yet.

"Unless we are satisfied that we are bringing them back to a relatively stable and safe environment, then they are not going back," U.N. Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees Soren Jessen-Petersen said after meeting Saturday with government ministers, rebel officials, U.N. staff and leaders of a regional intervention force.

He urged the rapid deployment of the 210 military observers approved by the U.N. Security Council in July, and the immediate disarmament and demobilization of Sierra Leone's

rebel and pro-government militias.

"If you can move fast with those two and consolidate what is still a very fragile peace, then I think there is hope," Jessen-Petersen said. "But there is no doubt that we are right now probably in the most dangerous period."

Just two months after the signing, the peace accord is already showing serious signs of strain.

Under the deal, the rebels are to be integrated into Sierra Leone's military and government. But rebel leader Foday Sankoh, now visiting Ivory Coast, has so far refused

to return to the capital because of security concerns.

At home, members of Sierra Leone's former junta — a theoretically allied rebel group — briefly kidnapped top leaders of the United Revolutionary Front, or RUF.

The accord also called for all sides to begin substantial disarmament and demobilization within six weeks. But only a few senior rebel officials are in Freetown, and just 300 of the estimated 20,000 rebel fighters have turned in their weapons.

At a Freetown camp for (See Leone, Page 18)

## WORLD BRIEFS

## MILLION DOLLAR INITIATIVE TO HELP AFRICAN FEMALE FARMERS

NEW YORK (IPS) — The New York-based Hunger Project, a non-governmental organization dedicated to ending world hunger, is launching a million dollar initiative in October to assist female farmers in Africa. Joan Holmes, president of the group, said that female food farmers labor up to twice as long per week as their male counterparts — producing, processing, and transporting virtually all of Africa's food. But, they own only about one percent of the land. They also receive less than 7.0 percent of farm extension services and less than 10 percent of the agricultural credit available to small farmers. She said the new initiative will increase women's access to low-interest loans, credit, education and vital agricultural inputs to strengthen their financial standing in society and enable them to invest in small scale agricultural ventures. It will also enable them to invest in basic technology which could reduce the drudgery of their work. As a part of the initiative, Hunger Project's annual "Africa Prize for Leadership" will be dedicated this year to women "who produce 80 percent of the continent's food, but who are consistently bypassed by governments and international aid programs."

## U.S. DRUG COMPANIES SUSPEND LAWSUIT AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

MEXICO CITY (IPS) — The decision this month by a group of U.S. pharmaceutical companies to suspend a lawsuit against South Africa for its law permitting the production of cheap, generic AIDS drugs, has raised hopes that such medication will become available to millions of South Africans. "The suspension of the lawsuit might well be interpreted by South Africa as a signal that they can begin the manufacture of cheaper versions of the most widely-used drugs to treat HIV," Richard Levinson of the American Public Health Association told IPS. "However, it is not clear to me that the drug companies might later re-institute their suit if the promised changes in relevant South African legislation do not satisfy them. "It seems unlikely that pharmaceutical firms will surrender their profit margins without a major battle," he said. The Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), which represents the 40 companies, said the lawsuit was suspended after the country's Health Minister Mantombazana Tshabalala-Msimang revealed that the law would be re-drafted.

## NIGERIA BOAT COLLISION KILLS 30

LAGOS Nigeria (AP) — Thirty people have died in a passenger boat collision on a river near the southeastern Nigerian coastal city of Calabar, a Lagos newspaper reported Saturday. The accident occurred Thursday when two passenger boats approaching the Calabar jetty from opposite directions, crashed into each other after one of them lost control, the Saturday Champion newspaper said, citing police sources. Rescuers pulled four survivors out of the water, the paper said. Police spokesman Joseph Eze, told the paper that a police had opened an investigation into the accident. Both boats had been packed with traders and produce. Boating accidents are common in Nigeria where vessels, used widely by traders in coastal and inland areas, are usually overcrowded and rarely carry lifejackets.

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