

## INTERNATIONAL

## AIDS drug given to South Africa's poor

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AP) — Pfizer Inc. is offering to give away an expensive AIDS drug to poor South Africans, a move that follows a series of protests and raises hopes other pharmaceutical companies will follow suit.

The drug, Diflucan, treats cryptococcal meningitis, a lethal brain infection that occurs in nearly one out of 10 HIV-patients.

In South Africa, the daily dose of Diflucan costs about \$15, far more than the country's many poor can afford.

Those with the infection must take medication for the rest of their lives.

The HIV and AIDS Treatment Action Campaign, an advocacy group, had lobbied the New York-based Pfizer for a year to reduce the

drug's price, said volunteer coordinator Midi Achmat.

Last month, a group of protesters broke into Pfizer's New York headquarters to demand a meeting with Chairman William Steere, though ultimately met with a lower-level executive.

Thabi Nyide, associate director of corporate affairs in Pfizer's Johannesburg office, said Monday that the lobbying was "probably part of a stream of events that led to this and not the only factor."

"With or without the demonstration, I'm sure we would have done something," she said.

"This is a response to an unmet medical need in the country."

Nyide said she did not know how much the offer would cost the company.

Details were still being discussed, and it was not yet certain how the process of supplying the drug would work, she said.

Pfizer's offer sparked hopes among activists that other pharmaceutical companies would follow suit and offer HIV and AIDS-related drugs at a discount or free. One in 10 South Africans — 4 million — are believed to have HIV or AIDS.

The Treatment Action Campaign also is lobbying other pharmaceutical firms to reduce prices of other HIV and AIDS-related drugs.

The campaign has new hope now that Pfizer has decided to provide Diflucan free, Achmat said.

The group is asking Glaxo Wellcome PLC, the maker of AZT, to make that drug available free to reduce the

risk of mother-to-infant transmission. But the British firm had no plans to offer AZT free, said Ben Plumley, head of Glaxo's external relations.

"Donations only make sense in short-term interventions and the problem with HIV is that it is a chronic disease," he said, adding that Glaxo typically offers AZT on a steep discount to patients in developing nations.

In South Africa, the discount is 75 percent, meaning Glaxo charges \$2 instead of \$8 for a daily dose, he said.

The firm is negotiating with the South African government to buy AZT.

Glaxo already gives away AZT to the relief organization UNICEF, which makes the pills available to people in developing countries, he said.

## CSI demands tough action on Sudanese slavery claims

Judith Acheng

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Nairobi, Kenya (IPS) — A Swiss-based aid agency, spearheading a global campaign to end slavery in the Sudan, has urged the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to condemn the government for "its blatant role in the revival of slavery."

In a report on "Slavery In Sudan," the Christian Solidarity International, headquartered in Geneva, charged that the buying and selling of human beings was a "common phenomenon" in Sudan.

During the 56th session report of the UNCHR, Commissioner Mary Robinson reportedly identified the northeastern African country as a place

where "traditional slavery persists."

Slavery is listed in international law among the crimes against humanity, which include genocide and racism.

The report also urges the session which sits this week with Sudan elected as the vice chair, to "devise and implement a coherent policy for the liberation of the Sudanese... and for the protection of the threatened civilian population."

Sudan's government, however, denies any involvement in slavery and has described the CSI allegations as "propaganda, to mobilize political and other international community resources to remove the current regime in Khartoum," says Farough Ali, head of the

Sudanese mission in Kenya.

The agency claims to have secured the freedom of nearly 5,000 African slaves in March alone, during "clandestine visits to the borderlands between northern and southern Sudan by a number of its representatives, members of the Cairo-based Sudan Human Rights Commission and independent journalists."

Slave trade in the Sudan has come to the surface in recent years with the escalation of the war in the south of the country, pitting the rebel Sudan Peoples Liberation Army rebels against the Islamist government in Khartoum.

SPLA is fighting for autonomy of the mainly Christian south from the Muslim north. The 17-year-

old Sudanese war has been termed one of the world's deadliest conflicts in which modern sophisticated weapons including aerial bombardment are said to be used indiscriminately and targeted at civilian populations.

An estimated two million people are thought to have died as a direct result of the war.

The raids and abductions have also been confirmed by a number of aid agencies working in southern Sudan, under the umbrella of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS).

CSI has also been joined in its global campaign to end slavery in Sudan by the Catholic Church, which runs the largest relief agency in (See Slavery, Page 10)

## Land seizure amendment passes in Zimbabwe

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) — Ruling party lawmakers approved a bill last week empowering the government to seize white-owned land without paying compensation as squatters illegally occupied several more white-owned farms across Zimbabwe.

The standoff between white landowners and the squatters occupying more than 900 of their farms comes in a nation where most blacks are landless and impoverished. President Robert Mugabe has described the occupations as a justifiable protest against the ownership of prime land by

the descendants of British settlers, though opponents say Mugabe's position is a political ploy.

One hundred lawmakers from Mugabe's ruling party voted Thursday in favor of the constitutional amendment allowing the seizures, achieving exactly the two-thirds vote needed to pass it in the 150-seat Parliament. Parliament's three opposition lawmakers, as well as 47 ruling party lawmakers, were absent, officials said.

Lawmakers cheered and howled at the announcement of the vote. The amendment will become law once Mugabe signs it.

Mugabe says the constitutional amendment will enable the government to speed up the nationalization of white-owned farms for redistribution to landless blacks. He says the redistribution has been held up by lack of funds to buy out the 4,000 white farmers, who own one-third of Zimbabwe's productive land.

The amendment empowers the government to seize land and pay compensation only for buildings and other "improvements" if Britain does not set up a special compensation fund to pay off

farmers, mostly the descendants of British settlers. Britain stopped financially supporting Zimbabwe's land reform program in 1992, citing mismanagement and corruption.

Meanwhile, squatters led by men claiming to be veterans of the bush war that ended white rule in what was then called Rhodesia in 1980 occupied several more farms Thursday. That brought the number of farms occupied since early February to 940, said Jerry Grant, deputy director of the Commercial Farmers' Union, which (See Zimbabwe, Page 10)

## WORLD BRIEFS

## ECOWAS ENACT BORDERLESS COMMUNITIES

Lagos, Nigeria (PANA) — A plan to integrate regions was implemented during the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) summit in Abuja. The plan called for the elimination of rigid border control for the creation of a borderless community. With an estimated population of 214 million and GDP of some \$107 billion, the 25-year-old ECOWAS has been unable to access its vast marketing potential. Issues of political instability have overshadowed efforts at economic integration. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo underscored the damage which lethargy had done to the community, enlightening his colleagues to the economic potential of a global economy governed by free market enterprise and emphasizing the need for mobilization. On ECOWAS highways strewn with a legion of check points, which inhibit free movement of people and goods, the mini-summit, attended by seven countries — Niger, Togo, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Benin, Mali and Nigeria — agreed to the elimination of barriers and to simplify border procedures.

## UN DETERMINED TO IMPLEMENT SIERRA LEONE ACCORD

New York, NY (PANA) - UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said the world body is determined to implement the Sierra Leonean peace agreement by deploying the 11,000 peacekeepers approved for the country. Responding to the likely collapse of the peace process in Sierra Leone, due to the indecisive nature of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Annan said he hoped the peace process would be successful. "I hope we don't repeat the experience of Angola," he added. A four-year peace process brokered by the UN to end the Angolan civil war collapsed in 1998 due to the failure of rebel UNITA to fulfill its obligations under the peace plan. Annan told reporters that although RUF and its leader, Foday Sankoh, appear uncooperative, efforts have been made to ensure that they comply with their commitments under the peace plan signed in Lome, Togo.

## MONROVIAN ARMY CLASHES WITH POLICE

Monrovia, Liberia (PANA) - A mid-morning burst of gunfire that sent thousands of Monrovia's scurrying for safety is the latest incident in a series of wrangles between the Liberian army and the police. Defense ministry spokesman Philipbert Browne told PANA a joint police-military panel which would report and make recommendations to reconcile the two agencies was investigating the matter. Liberian security forces have often clashed over the lack of proper delineation of functions, sometimes leading to the discharge of firearms. Heads of security agencies have been appearing before the senate security committee to testify.

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