

South Africa asks United States help with AIDS crisis

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Clinton met Monday with South African President Thabo Mbeki to pursue ways to help South Africa end its long-running fight with drug companies over producing cheaper, generic AIDS treatments.

Shortly after Mbeki arrived at the White House, Clinton said he was sympathetic to Mbeki's goal of getting cheaper AIDS drugs. He said he was encouraged to learn that five companies offered last week to lower their prices.

"We've got to get them to him. He's got to be able to afford them," Clinton said. "You've got these five big

pharmaceutical companies now that say they're going to help. The next couple months we'll see if we really can get a victory."

Earlier this month, Clinton signed an executive order designed to make cheaper drugs more available in Africa. He said South Africa's AIDS burdens could be eased if Congress passes his proposal to offer tax incentives for developing AIDS vaccines.

Besides AIDS, the two leaders discussed trade, renewed war in the Horn of Africa, unrest in Sierra Leone, Congo and Zimbabwe, and poverty in general throughout the continent.

"These are hard challenges without easy answers, and they will test our partnership," Clinton said. "But that is what partners are for, to solve big problems together."

Mbeki praised Clinton for prodding other nations to take a greater interest in fighting the problems that plague Africa — such as disease, famine and war.

"You and your administration have treated us with dignity, whatever our differences on specific matters, with sensitivity to our problems in an unwavering commitment to help us resolve these," Mbeki said.

Arguing that it cannot afford AIDS drugs at current

prices, South Africa has been embroiled in a protracted fight with pharmaceutical companies over importing generic versions of drugs for which the companies have patents. Mbeki's government was lukewarm to the companies' offer of cut-rate drugs, saying it could not accept if it also had to give up the right to seek cheaper generics.

Going into his meeting with Clinton, Mbeki defended his positions on fighting AIDS, which infects one in 10 South Africans. South Africa has contacts with scientists who argue that AZT, a common treatment, does not work and the human immunodeficiency virus does not

cause AIDS. And earlier this year, Mbeki refused to allow AZT for pregnant women.

Mbeki flatly denied saying AZT is ineffective. "I never said that. Pure invention. Pure invention," he said. "There's a lot of stuff that's been written which is not true."

He explained that he feels AZT is a difficulty for his country because it lacks the appropriate medical infrastructure to supervise patients. As for the drug companies' offer, Mbeki said his country is working with the United Nations and the World Health Organization to "see how to respond to that."

The White House seemed

satisfied with Mbeki's explanation that he was misquoted. "The important thing is the president has said that President Mbeki understands the scope of the (AIDS) problem," Lockhart said.

A senior Clinton administration official, who spoke to reporters on condition of anonymity, said the United States recognizes that South Africa cannot afford anything like the estimated \$2.2 billion it would cost to administer universal AZT treatment.

Mbeki became president last June, succeeding Nelson Mandela, who met privately with Clinton last week. During Mbeki's tenure, South (See AIDS, Page 15)

ACLU sues U.S. Customs Service over 'flying while black' incident

NEW YORK (NNPA) — The American Civil Liberties Union charged the U.S. Customs Service with racial profiling in a federal lawsuit, responding to claims by the agency that the humiliating physical search of a young African-American woman at Newark International Airport last year was nothing more than a routine "pat-down."

The incident occurred in the wake of several lawsuits being filed around the nation by Black women who claim U.S. Customs officials are targeting them for harassment.

Yvette Bradley, a 33-year-old advertising executive at SpikeDDB, a partnership between filmmaker Spike Lee and DDB Needham Adver-

tising, said that as she and her sister arrived at Newark Airport last April from a vacation in Jamaica, they, along with most of the other Black women on the flight, were singled out for searches and interrogation by Customs agents.

"Inside that Customs office, I experienced one of the most humiliating moments of my life," Bradley said of the search.

According to the ACLU lawsuit, Bradley was led to a room at the airport and instructed to place her hands on the wall while an officer ran her hands and fingers over every area of her body, including her breasts and the inner and outer labia of her vagina.

The search did not reveal any drugs or contraband.

Bradley said she decided to go ahead with the lawsuit after U.S. Customs officials categorically denied that her search was anything more than a routine "pat-down."

"Yvette Bradley's experience is a textbook example of racial profiling," said Reginald Shuford, one of the ACLU attorneys representing Bradley. "And yet the Customs Service has denied any wrongdoing in her case."

"No one should be forced to ask herself whether taking a well-deserved vacation is worth the likelihood of being targeted for an invasive, degrading search," he added.

In a statement, Lee said he was "outraged and sad-

dened" by Bradley's experience, "not only on her behalf but on behalf of all African-American women who have come to expect and fear this humiliating treatment."

In recent months, Customs Service officials have publicly stated they are taking steps to end the practice of racial profiling. Customs Commissioner Raymond Kelly has said in news interviews that the agency is increasing supervision of officers who conduct the searches in airports, training them in cultural differences, and tracking the race and gender statistics of those they search.

But while these remedies are important first steps, the ACLU said the searches are so offensive and so wide-

spread that independent judicial supervision may be necessary to ensure that the appropriate reforms are implemented.

Lenora Lapidus, legal director of the ACLU of New Jersey and one of Bradley's attorneys, said "flying while Black" racial profiling is not limited to a single airport or part of the country.

"This discriminatory behavior affects a huge portion of the population: women of color who choose to travel," she said.

Statistics bear this out. According to a March 2000 General Accounting Office report, Black women were nine times more likely than white women to be x-rayed after being frisked or patted down, yet Black women were

less than half as likely to be found carrying contraband as white women.

Recently, spurred by the rash of complaints by minorities about unfair treatment at the hands of Customs Service agents, Reps. John D. Lewis, D-Ga., and Amo Houghton, R-N.Y., introduced the "Civil Rights for International Travelers Act."

The bill, H.R. 4001, at press time pending before a House Committee, would mark the first time that a federal law enforcement agency would be barred from using race to determine who is searched.

A similar bill, the "Reasonable Search Standards Act," S. 2393, was introduced in the Senate by Democrat Richard Durbin of Illinois.

Rev. Jackson to Sierra Leone rebels: Disarm

WASHINGTON (AP)—Sierra Leone's rebels should disarm voluntarily or be disarmed because continued violence in the West African nation poses a threat to regional stability, President Clinton's special envoy to the region said Monday.

Returning to the United States to report to Clinton, civil rights activist Jesse Jackson in a telephone interview also called on Congress to provide financial support for efforts to bring peace to Sierra Leone.

"Holding up resources jeopardizes more lives," Jackson said. "If U.S. troops are not going in, then the burden is on Congress to provide financial support for allies who are ready to help."

Both the State Department and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan called on Monday for the lifting of a U.S. legislative hold on \$226 million for U.N. peacekeeping activities, including those in Sierra Leone.

Jackson also criticized the reported killing of more U.N. peacekeepers in Sierra Leone by the rebels, saying it shows "the contempt they have for democracy. They must be held accountable."

After visiting Nigeria, Mali and Liberia over the weekend, Jackson said Nigeria was ready to lead a regional force which would try to halt fighting between the rebels and government forces in Sierra Leone.

"But these troops must have a peace enforcement (See Jackson, Page 15)

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