

U.N.: Cholera has claimed 500 victims in Africa

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) - A cholera epidemic spreading across West Africa has sickened tens of thousands of people this year and killed nearly 500 amid a long-term deterioration in health services in one of the world's poorest regions, the United Nations said Thursday.

Cholera has stricken 31,259 people in nine west African countries since June and 488 are reported dead in what the United Nations called an "upsurge" of the bacterial infection of the intestine. Year-ago figures weren't provided.

"It's not business as usual. We have a crisis that needs immediate attention," Herve Ludovic de Lys, head of the U.N.'s humanitarian-affairs coordination efforts in the region, told reporters. "This

crisis needs a rapid response."

As heavy rains continue across West Africa, the disease often transmitted by infected water is likely to spread into Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad in the coming months, the world body said in a statement.

The increase in cholera this year is part of a longer-term deterioration of health services in West Africa, de Lys said.

"It's a region which worsens each year. That's the reality of West Africa and the situation in which we're working," de Lys said of the region containing many of the world's least-developed nations.

Difficult climactic conditions and conflict cause mass movements of people, hurt-

ing efforts to contain the disease that causes death by dehydration from diarrhea and vomiting, said de Lys.

Cholera can be easily treated if patients are rehydrated quickly.

Cholera is often transmitted by infected water, rarely a problem in rich nations but all-too common in a region of pit latrines, untreated drinking-water supplies and communal wells.

Chlorinating wells, improving sanitation and boosting knowledge of how the disease is spread would help cut the spread of cholera, experts say.

The U.N. said west African countries so far reporting cholera infections and deaths are Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Guinea, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali, Ivory

Coast and Niger — epicenter of the region's deadly food crisis.

Further south, a cholera outbreak among soldiers and their families in eastern Congo killed at least 19 people and sickened over 700 in recent days.

The worst-hit country in West Africa, per capita, is the former Portuguese colony of Guinea-Bissau, where nearly 1 percent of the country's 1.5 million people have fallen ill with cholera.

After years of civil conflict and poor governance, the country's health care system is in shambles. Health authorities have reported 9,047 infections including 172 deaths between June 6 and August 21.

Hardest hit are residents of the crumbling capital,

Bissau, where bullet holes still pock buildings and tanks lay rusting alongside roads after the country's 1998-1999 civil war.

The UN said Guinea-Bissau's situation could worsen yet.

"If nothing happens, we could have an unimaginable toll," John Mulangu, a top

regional official of the U.N.'s World Health Organization, told reporters.

Increased funding and health care material for treatment and prevention efforts are needed, the officials said.

"It's a focal point and we need to pay attention to avert a humanitarian disaster," said Mulangu.

Zimbabwe blames CIA for new movie

HARARE, Zimbabwe (AP) - President Robert Mugabe's government has attacked the suspense thriller "The Interpreter," starring Nicole Kidman, claiming it is part of a propaganda campaign by the CIA that shows "Zimbabwe's enemies did not rest."

The *Herald*, the government-controlled daily newspaper, also linked the film to efforts by Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer last week to have Mugabe indicted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

In the film, Kidman plays a United Nations interpreter who overhears two people discussing an apparent assassination plot against the president of a fictional Republic of Matobo. The president, Edmond Zuwanie, is accused of ethnic cleansing and plans to address the U.N. General Assembly in an attempt to forestall indictment by the International Criminal Court.

Two months after Zimbabwe's official censorship board approved the film's screening here, acting Minister of Information and Publicity Chen Chimutengwende told *The Herald* in Saturday's editions: "The CIA-backed film showed that Zimbabwe's enemies did not rest."

Zuwanie and the fictional country he leads have been interpreted as caricatures of Mugabe and Zimbabwe.

"The film just shows how careful we have to be and that we should know our enemy is very powerful," Chimutengwende said. "We should plan to counter Euro-American imperialism. Our enemies have resources and are determined to wage their war on the economic, social and cultural fronts."

The film ran for two weeks in early July at Harare cinemas and is available here on video.

Zimbabwe has become an international outcast in recent years because of repression and economic mismanagement by Mugabe's regime. The government claims Western sanctions and boycotts are to blame for the country's looming financial collapse.

Annan urges nations to address poverty

UNITED NATIONS (AP) - With next week's U.N. summit looming, Secretary-General Kofi Annan warned the world's nations Monday that they have just a few days to salvage "a once in a generation opportunity" to fight poverty and overhaul the United Nations.

He said in a British Broadcasting Corp. interview it was "unfortunate" that the United States waited until just last month to propose hundreds of amendments to a final document for world leaders to consider adopting. Annan said it opened "the floodgates" to other amendments and changed the dynamics of the negotiations.

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton has said Washington had been making similar pro-

posals since June to General Assembly President Jean Ping, who has been overseeing the document's preparation.

Ping was putting together a new draft with changes agreed upon over a week of negotiations and the outstanding issues — many of them key — ahead of the Sept. 14-16 summit, expected to draw 175 world leaders.

Annan told the BBC that he will be able to judge by late Wednesday if there is a risk of failure.

"I think we have a couple of days in which to salvage this process. But to do that, it requires a maturity and leadership and appreciation of what we are trying to do," he said.

"I think this is a once in a generation opportunity that we have to do this."

Among the issues: a Human Rights Council with more authority to replace the discredited Human Rights Commission; a Peacebuilding Commission to help nations emerging from conflict; new responsibility for governments to protect civilians facing genocide and war crimes; disarmament and nonproliferation; overhauling U.N. management; and steps to fight poverty.

Developing countries — who comprise the majority of member states — say their top priority is action to improve the lives of their citizens and meet U.N.-sponsored goals that include cutting extreme poverty by half,

ensuring universal primary education, and stemming the AIDS pandemic, all by 2015.

In the upcoming final negotiations, Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador Munir Akram said "what happens in the development section... will influence positions on other parts of the document."

The United States has been widely criticized for seeking to eliminate references to the goals. The proposed U.S. changes would also delete a call for rich nations to spend 0.7 percent of GNP on development aid.

President Bush has almost doubled international assistance, but the United States still spent just 0.16 percent of GNP on development aid in 2004, according to a recent U.N. report.

Terror

(Continued from Page 15) was a bodyguard for al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden. Investigators also questioned him about the July 7 bombings, but London police have discounted any connection.

Aswat, who has family in Johannesburg, supported himself here by selling Islamic CDs and DVDs at flea markets, according to Ahmed al-Arine, a Jordanian immigrant who worked for him. But that is unlikely to explain — or finance — the amount of traveling he did.

In 1999, Khalfan Khamis Mohamed was arrested in Cape Town and deported to the United States; he is now jailed for life for his role in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Tanzania

and Kenya. The Tanzanian had entered South Africa under an alias, got a temporary residency permit, and worked at a hamburger place for months until he tried to renew his permit and got caught.

Netshitenzhe acknowledged the presence of the two major suspects raises questions but said their arrests show local security forces are working well with their international counterparts to fight terrorism. The government spokesman said terrorism "is a silent menace" fought mostly behind the scenes.

Aswat was closely monitored before his arrest, investigators said.

Last year, South Africa also deported two Egyptian

brothers, one with asylum status in Britain, and two Jordanians after questioning them about a suspected plot to launch attacks during the 2004 South African election. No charges were brought.

But the government has shown little desire to investigate its own Muslim community, in part because it does not want to alienate it, said Shillinger, the analyst.

A handful of South Africa's Muslims, who are of Pakistani, Indian and Malaysian descent, are believed to have fought in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Hamas and Hezbollah may also have been active here since the 1990s, said the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies. Two South Africans

were arrested in the Pakistan city of Gujarat last year in a gun battle that netted Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani, a Tanzanian al-Qaida suspect in the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa. Both men were released without charge, their link to Ghailani never explained.

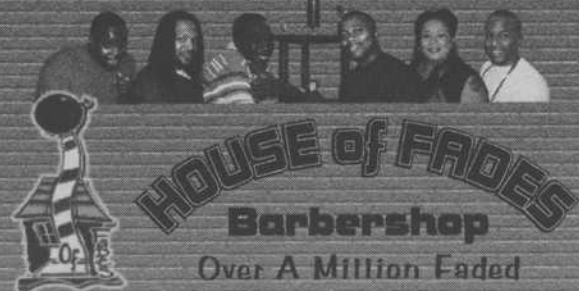
Most Muslims in South Africa are moderates and embrace their government's vision of multicultural democracy after the oppression of apartheid. "As South Africans, we wouldn't want this young democracy to be damaged by irresponsible people, whether they come with Muslim names or non-Muslim names," said Moulana Ihsaan Hendriks, of the Muslim Judicial Council.

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