

Hunger big enemy in war on AIDS

CANGE, Haiti (AP) - AIDS made Marie Lourdes Israel so sick she could barely move her bowed, stick-thin body. The medicine almost killed her. Her plight wasn't due to a problem with the drug, but with something more basic: She had no food, and taking the AIDS cocktail on an empty stomach caused severe stomach aches, dizziness and nausea.

"Sometimes I would eat once a day, sometimes not at all because I couldn't find

anything," said Israel, 51, who lost her meager earnings as a schoolteacher after falling ill to the virus that kills 15,000 Haitians each year.

Starvation and malnutrition are fast becoming the twin perils of the AIDS fight, and doctors and health experts say millions of infected people in the developing world are rapidly approaching a tipping point where food will replace drugs as the biggest need.

The U.N. World Food Program has launched nutri-

tion programs in Haiti and 50 other countries with the worst HIV rates, providing monthly food supplements for patients and their families.

Without adequate nutrition, AIDS sufferers cannot absorb the drugs needed to slow the virus. As in Israel's case, side effects from taking the pills without food can lead patients to neglect treatment.

"When you have the meds and don't have the food... then the bigger problem be-

comes food security," said Harvard University professor Dr. Paul Farmer, founder of Partners in Health, a pioneering medical mission in Haiti's highlands that gives free treatment to thousands.

Worldwide, an estimated 3.8 million people with AIDS needed food support this year, possibly rising to 6.4 million by 2008, according to the World Food Program.

Hungry people are six times more likely to die when going on AIDS medication than those with good nutri-

tion, according to a study in the British journal HIV Medicine.

Robin Jackson, chief of the World Food Program's HIV/AIDS service in Rome, said it was unthinkable to give drugs to a malnourished patient, because "not only will the drug not be very effective, but you're not going to feel well either" because of severe stomach aches and nausea. "Would you think in the West we would ever give drugs to someone who was malnourished? No, we don't do that," Jackson said.

Many people in Africa and Haiti simply refuse free drugs unless they come with food, leaving little hope for their survival, doctors say.

A recent World Food Program study found that it would cost only 66 cents a day to feed an AIDS patient and family, but health experts say that having poured billions into free drug programs, many donors are reluctant to take on the added costs of food supplements.

At a recent AIDS conference in Toronto, Stephen Lewis, special U.N. envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, called the lack of funding for food "madness."

The experts say health workers in the Third World must view food security as being no less important to a person's health than the right drugs and regular checkups.

Although health professionals don't want to be food distributors, Farmer said, "We need to be in the business of handing out food."

The fight against AIDS and malnutrition is evident in Cange, a mountain hamlet in Haiti's barren Central Plateau and ground zero for the Car-

ibbean country's struggle with AIDS.

A three-hour drive from the capital along a spine-jarring, rutted road, the town attracts thousands of people who flock to Farmer's Zanmi Lasante Hospital for free AIDS drugs and, more recently, free food from the World Food Program.

"Before, when I had nothing to eat, it was painful to take the drugs. I was suffering," said Jeudy Andre, a 38-year-old mother of six, as she hauled away a sack of rice, beans, meat and oil at a WFP-run food distribution site.

For Israel, months with little food left her weak and so depressed she could barely get out of bed. Now she has regained the weight and has a healthy glow.

"I have hope, because I look completely different from before," she said, her braided hair tucked beneath a red ball cap.

Others aren't as lucky.

Inside the infectious disease ward at St. Michel Hospital in Boucan Carre, another Central Plateau town, a man in his 30s lay motionless on a bed, flies buzzing around his emaciated body.

Diagnosed with AIDS two weeks earlier, he should be on his feet once the drugs kick in. But with no way to earn a living in his miserably poor village, finding a meal will be a challenge.

Dr. Chevrin Francky, one of the ward's two physicians, said he has lost several patients this year to the food problem and expects to lose more.

"We have the medicine, but many patients don't have food," Francky said. "The biggest problem is poverty."

U.N. offers \$77 million to Darfur

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) - The United Nations said Monday it has pledged about \$77 million in personnel and equipment to help the overwhelmed African Union force in Darfur as Sudan blocks the world body from sending its own peacekeepers to the war-torn region.

The package includes military and police advisors, communications equipment and tools like night-vision goggles, said Hedi Annabi, the U.N. assistant secretary general for peacekeeping operations.

It will be given to the African Union as soon as possible.

The aid has been offered because of Sudan's refusal to allow a U.N. peacekeeping force in Darfur, Annabi told

reporters.

"That (willingness) is not there today (for a United Nations peacekeeping force), so in the meantime we are looking at ways in which we can move forward by reinforcing (the African Union Mission in Sudan) to enable it to go on with its tasks effectively," Annabi said.

The U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York said the Sudanese government initially agreed to allow the United Nations to provide the AU troops with a support package worth about \$22 million. Annabi was able to secure the government's agreement to allow the rest of the \$77 million aid package to go through in the last few days.

Annabi, who recently visited Sudan, said he will soon

start discussions on another support package for the AU force, but he did not say how much that would be worth.

Annabi spoke after a meeting of African Union, U.N. and Sudanese officials to discuss the deteriorating situation in Darfur with the AU's mandate due to expire on Dec. 31.

The U.N. Security Council voted in August to send more than 20,000 peacekeepers to Darfur to replace the ill-equipped, underfunded African Union force, but Sudan has rejected this.

The African Union currently has 7,000 troops in the violence-plagued region to monitor a shaky cease-fire signed earlier this year by the government and one rebel faction.

The announcement came

as the U.N. reported nearly 40 civilian deaths in recent attacks in Darfur by Arab militiamen — some of whom were backed by Sudanese military vehicles.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the African Union also have invited representatives from the five permanent members of the Security Council, several African countries, the League of Arab States and the European Union to discuss the deteriorating situation in Darfur, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said.

Dujarric said Annan would attend the meeting this week in Ethiopia, as would representatives from Sudan's government.

The African Union's peace and security commissioner Said Djinnit said the organization's peacekeeping mission needed even more donor support. Some pledged millions a few months ago, but little has been received, he said.

"This is a matter of urgency," he said. "This ad hoc (See Darfur, Page 15)

Missouri

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Jonas Hughes, State Rep. Martin Rucker, State Rep. Michael Brown, Nasheed and El-Amin.

They filed yesterday to be recognized as a new caucus, Urban Progressive Caucus, which will also include State Rep. Talbo, a Hispanic.

Most of the legislators remaining in the caucus now have positions as officers within it. Other than Bowman as president, the officers, all Democrats, are State Sen. Yvonne Wilson of Kansas City, vice chair; State Rep. Robin Wright-Jones of St. Louis, caucus secretary; and State Sen. Rita Heard Days of St. Louis, treasurer.

The other remaining caucus members are elected state officials Sen. Maida Coleman, Rep. Juanita Head-Walton and Rep. Craig Bland.

Several legislators who quit the caucus also expressed dissatisfaction with

the way Bowman handled an outreach assignment he had held within the Claire McCaskill campaign.

Bowman had not returned a call placed earlier this week following a press release he distributed naming the new caucus officers but making no mention of the split.

"We are now stronger and moving the Black Caucus steadily forward," Bowman wrote.

The new caucus will embrace sworn enemies on the school choice issue who have fought bitterly in public and print. Hubbard and Chappelle-Nadal, who are enemies on the school choice issue, are said to be working together to support a candidate for chairman of the new caucus.

If the split into two caucuses develops into two factions, the divide could also represent likely future rivals in state Senate seats that will be coming open due to term

limits.

Also on last week, Senate Democrats returned Sen. Maida Coleman (D-St. Louis) to her position as minority floor leader during the first caucus meeting of the new Senate members.

"While Missouri didn't make the dramatic gains of Democrats at the national level, picking up two Senate seats and five House seats is notable," she said.

"Missouri is a cautious state, but we laid the groundwork for 2008."

Coleman emphasized that the Democratic caucus is strongly united and will be acting in the best interests of Missouri's citizenry.

"Democrats will be outlining our legislative priorities more fully in the coming weeks," she said. "I hope Republicans will take notice of the changing political air nationally and in Missouri, and focus on solving problems."

Michigan

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state universities, Michigan does not have a quota on the number of out-of-state students. Plus, unlike states such as Texas, there is no law that mandates that the valedictorian of a central city school must get a scholarship to the institution.

The NAACP cited other examples of the devastating effects of affirmative action bans on the enrollment of Black students:

- The 2000 entering class at UCLA's law school was 1.4 percent Black compared to 10 percent before the 1996 ban on affirmative action.

- The number of women faculty in the University of California system has decreased 22 percent since the ban.

- Contracts to women and minority firms have decreased in Washington state 25 percent since its ban, according to the Seattle Times.

- At the University of Texas Law School,

Latino admissions have been cut in half since that state's ban.

If Proposal 2 withstands court challenges, being Black or a woman could not be a positive in the admissions process.

Proposal 2 passed under the misnomer of "The Michigan Civil Rights Initiative," which stated, in sum, that race could not be a factor in admissions to the state's universities or in employment with the state government. Financial aid and scholarship funds based on race would also be banned if Proposal 2 is implemented.

Ward Connerly, a Black businessman, helped to pass a similar measure in California a few years ago. Connerly believes that race-sensitive remedies in favor of minorities is just as discriminatory as laws and practices favoring Whites were several decades ago.

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