

UN fund says money running out to fight AIDS

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The Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria has announced that unless donations double it will have to stop processing grant applications because requests for help have outstripped the money available.

Set up by the United Nations with the intention of raising \$10 billion to combat AIDS in poor countries, the fund has so far received only \$2.1 billion in pledges and only \$650 million in hard cash.

Fund director Richard Feachem said, “We can’t go on making commitments to fund projects without being dead sure we have the money.”

The announcement follows two reports this year that predict a global escalation in the AIDS epidemic. In the face of the devastating results of a disease that is claiming three million lives a year, both reports stress not the need for an increase in funding but the security threat that the epidemic poses to the United States.

The Next Wave of HIV/Aids: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, India and China was produced by the National Intelligence Council (NIC), a body that answers directly to the US director of Central Intelligence, George Tenet, and whose function is to develop medium to long-term strategic intelligence policy.

The other report is by the Washington-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Entitled *The Destabilising Impact of HIV/Aids*, it is subtitled *First Wave Hits Eastern and Southern Africa; Second Wave Threatens India, China, Russia, Ethiopia, Nigeria*.

In the preamble to the report the CSIS declares its role to be, “providing world leaders with strategic insights on—and policy solutions to—current and emerging global issues.” It is led by John J. Hamre, a former US deputy defence secretary.

The authors of the report are Mark Schneider, senior vice-president of the International Crisis Group, and Michael Moodie, president of the Chemical and Biological Arms Control Institute. The report was the result of two years research carried out by the CSIS Task Force on HIV/Aids. It was funded amongst others by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

According to the report, it was produced “to highlight for military and security policy leaders the security challenges posed by rapidly spreading HIV/Aids and to propose concrete measures to strengthen the US response to these emerging challenges.”

The CSIS held a two-day conference at the beginning of October to discuss the so-called second wave of the HIV/Aids pandemic. Among the speakers were David Gordon, who produced the NIC’s

report, academics and politicians from China, Nigeria and Ethiopia and representatives from the World Bank and UNAids.

The CSIS report notes that in South Africa infant mortality has increased by 44 percent. In sub-Saharan Africa as a whole the pandemic has orphaned 13 million children. Sierra Leone has five times more children orphaned through AIDS than as a result of that country’s savage civil war.

So far seven million agricultural workers have died in sub-Saharan Africa producing a measurable effect on the economy. World Bank figures suggest that a 5 percent infection rate will impact on economic growth, while a 10 percent infection rate will stop economic growth. When infection rates reach 20 percent a country’s GDP decreases by one percent a year. Currently seven countries in sub-Saharan Africa have more than a 20 percent level of infection.

Both reports concentrate on the five countries they see as bearing the brunt of the “second wave” of the HIV/Aids pandemic—Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, China and India. Between them these countries comprise 40 percent of the world’s population.

The NIC report has used the figures of various experts to estimate the current rates of HIV infection in these countries and to project the expected rate in 2010. Current figures range from 14 to 23 million people and are expected to reach between 50 and 75 million by 2010. In contrast, experts estimate the number of cases in sub-Saharan Africa to reach between 30 and 35 million by 2010. In other words the “second wave” of HIV infection is expected to dwarf that of Southern Africa.

Nigeria has an official HIV infection rate of 6 percent, but the NIC report suggests that it is probably nearer 10 percent, meaning that around five million people are infected. The report estimates that by 2010 there will be between 10 and 15 million people infected, giving an incidence of between 18 and 26 percent of the adult population, i.e., on a par with countries with the highest levels in Southern Africa.

Ethiopia, with an estimated infection rate between 10 percent and 18 percent, is the highest of the five “second wave” countries. The Ethiopian government says there are nearly three million people with the disease, but experts consider there to be closer to four million. According to the NIC report this will rise to between seven and ten million by 2010.

Russia, according to official statistics, has around 200,000 people with HIV/Aids, but experts suggest the true figure is likely

to be more than a million. The NIC report expects this to be between 5 and 7.5 million by 2010. According to the CSIS report, the cumulative impact of HIV, alcoholism, disease and environmental factors is leading to an increased mortality rate which, left unchecked, will mean that by 2050 Russia's population will have been reduced to two thirds its current level.

The NIC report anticipates that cases in India will surge to between 20 and 25 million by 2010 and in China to between 10 and 15 million. Currently the figures are between five and eight million for India and one to two million for China. Although they would both still have low incidence rates, with its enormous population this would mean India would become the country in the world with the highest number of HIV cases.

The NIC and the CSIS are, in the words of the *Economist* magazine, "scared" and in their own terms they have plenty to be scared about. In the case of Nigeria the CSIS report comments, "The United States ... as Secretary of State Colin Powell told the Senate last year, looks to a strong Nigeria to transform the prospects of people across Africa." The US has been providing finance and training to the Nigerian army to enable it to act as its proxy force in West Africa, which is becoming strategically important as a source of oil. AIDS threatens to undermine that strategy. Since, as the report says, "Weakened militaries leave a vacuum, at home and abroad, which gangs, terrorist organisations, and guerilla groups will be only too tempted to fill."

The Horn of Africa has had and will have increasing strategic importance to the US because of its proximity to the Middle East and the western sea-lanes to the Indian subcontinent. The CSIS report states that the US looks to Ethiopia "to play a constructive political-military role in the region; yet its army is believed to be highly infected." It predicts "the disappearance of peacekeeping forces and other restraining factors, and eventually of major state failure. As the United States works to deny havens to extremists and terrorists in failing and failed states, this threat to Africa is not one it can ignore. It is real, and it's bearing down fast."

What neither of the reports addresses is the role of US foreign policy in creating this situation. The US has fomented wars in the Horn of Africa that have exacerbated the spread of the AIDS. Throughout Africa it has driven already poor countries into even greater poverty through debt repayments. For years it propped up the iniquitous apartheid regime in South Africa that has left a legacy of deprivation in which AIDS has spread rapidly.

In Russia the restoration of capitalism, for long the central objective of US foreign policy, has devastated the country's economy and social structure. Health provision is on an almost third world level. High levels of unemployment and social despair have seen an enormous leap in drug abuse. Around 90 percent of the incidence of the spread of HIV is associated with drug addiction.

In China, the CSIS report fears, "The social and economic consequences of an HIV/AIDS epidemic could have major implications for the regime's legitimacy, for the reliability of China's armed forces and for China's restive minority groups." The restoration of capitalism has forced peasants into the towns as migrant workers where they have become vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases.

While the second wave is an undoubted fact and the epidemiologists have already been wrong about the extent of the spread of AIDS, there is a large measure of exaggeration in the two reports. Serious AIDS professionals have questioned its figures. Neff Walker, an epidemiologist at UNAIDS, said, "They are applying a worst-case scenario systematically through all of these countries. I wouldn't rule out these projections. They could be right, but they're not probable."

The alarmist projections in the reports are not intended to galvanise Western governments and the international financial institutions into action and to make good the shortfall in funds. In all their many pages there is not a single concrete suggestion for stemming the pandemic. The reports are the product of a ruling clique paralysed by their own paranoia. Insulated from the experiences and interests of the mass of the world's population by the obscene wealth of corporate America, they are incapable of directing their country's considerable material and intellectual resources into a concerted international effort to halt the spread of AIDS and the search for a cure for this disease.

Faced with a global humanitarian crisis they respond not by raising money, planning public health programmes, developing vaccine research strategies or proposing the production of large quantities of cheap anti-retrovirals, but by developing a defence strategy against a perceived security threat to their own privileged existence. Confronted by sick people and AIDS orphans they call in the CIA and the defence analysts.

Such an inappropriate response would suggest that some collective mental disorder had settled on Washington, afflicting its policymakers with paranoid delusions, until we recall that a long train of actions has brought them to this pass. They created the conditions in which this epidemic has been possible and now amidst the stock market collapse and corporate scandals and election fraud they lack the political will to mobilise the kind of response that is necessary. All they can do is reach once again for the one weapon remaining to them—military force.



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