

Call for Research on Assessing the Effects of HIV/AIDS on African Police and Non-Military Uniformed Services

Background

The African Civil Society Governance and AIDS Initiative (GAIN) was launched in 2003, bringing together policy analysts, NGOs, academics and research institutions engaged in seeking to address the governance challenges presented by HIV/AIDS in African nations. It commissions research into the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS and governance in African nations, with current research programmes on democracy, security and gender.

As part of this research, Justice Africa will be seeking new approaches to the conceptualisation of and planning for HIV/AIDS within the security sector, including security sector reform, post-conflict reconstruction, human rights, and the effect of HIV/AIDS on the modern notion of human security.

A number of analyses have been made of the effect of HIV/AIDS on armed forces, and upon the security sector and international political stability generally.¹ This is useful new research, but gives the impression that ‘security’ is only synonymous with national armed forces. This overlooks a key reality across Africa that security is often not compartmentalised separate to civil society, and that the linkages of civilian life, security services, police and the military are complex. A number of issues persist, including poor resources, political instability, social dislocation, and humanitarian

¹ See, for example, Docking, T: ‘AIDS and Violent Conflict in Africa’; Washington DC, United States Institute of Peace Special Report (2001); Bazergan, R and Easterbrook, P: ‘HIV and UN Peacekeeping Operations’; AIDS, Vol.17, No.2 (2003); Elbe, S: ‘HIV/AIDS and the Landscape of War in West Africa’; International Security, Vol.27, No.2 (2002); Hankins C A, Friedman S R, Zafar T and Strathdee S A: ‘Transmission and Prevention of HIV and Sexually Transmitted Infections in War Settings: Implications for Current and Future Armed Conflicts’; AIDS, Vol.16, No.17 (2002); Ostergard R L: ‘Politics in the hot zone: AIDS and national security in Africa’; Third World Quarterly, Vol.23, No.2 (2002)

crisis; as Ismail Rashid shows: “The degeneration of security agencies and the concomitant proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons are a crucial part of the toxic mélange of ...Africa’s violent conflicts.”²

The reality is that the ‘security sector’ is not limited to military personnel; and the other key group here- police and other non-military uniformed forces- deserve at least as much attention in the fight against HIV/AIDS as soldiers do. The police are in fact the front line in the maintenance of law and order. Two things can be said; that substantive, quantitative research on the effect of HIV/AIDS on police and non-military uniformed services are under-researched in Africa, and that police and domestic security services are a crucial constituency to understand in the transmission of HIV/AIDS due to the demographic profile of police and uniformed forces, the relative social and physical mobility of members of this group, and the relative exposure of personnel to high-risk social behaviours. The police have a special role insofar as they are also responsible for enforcing laws and regulations concerning commercial sex work, and their methods and attitudes can thereby be an important determinant of the HIV risk levels in this sector. The police are also the first line of recourse for victims of sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation, and how they handle these cases can have an important impact on HIV vulnerability.

New research, therefore, is needed to promote the issue of HIV/AIDS and police and uniformed services, and to delineate this from the wider issue of HIV/AIDS and security. Because of the lack of data and research on this issue, a key task of research will be to propose a list of substantive issues that need to be engaged with.

It should be noted here that the term ‘non-military uniformed services’ is used to include, but are not limited to, national criminal investigation services, customs and border security forces, prison services, regulated private security agencies, and military police and civilian personnel working for any of these groups. Irregular forces are not included.

² Rashid I, ‘West Africa’s Post-Cold War Security Challenges’, in Adebajo, A and Rashid I: ‘West Africa’s Security Challenges’; Lynne Rienner, London (2004); pp.389

A number of issues that require research, and these are by no means exhaustive, include:

- 1) Prevalence and patterns of HIV in police forces.
- 2) Impact of AIDS-related illness and death on the staffing and functioning of police and uniformed services.
- 3) Incorporation of HIV/AIDS into the training programmes of police and uniformed services at academies and training facilities.
- 4) The attitudes and practices of police officers in enforcing rules and regulations concerning the commercial sex business and other high-risk groups such as intravenous drug users.
- 5) Police and judicial practices in the treatment of victims of sex- and gender-based violence and exploitation.
- 6) HIV/AIDS in prisons and the prison service, including prevalence estimates, current practices in prevention and treatment, and the impact on the prison service.

Action

Justice Africa will develop new programmes on HIV/AIDS and security during 2005/2006, and will invite researchers to undertake small-scale research exercises costing up to US\$5,000 that would focus on HIV/AIDS and police and uniformed services, to be conducted in the African nation of the researchers choice. All submissions would need to include programme costs, travel and fees below the \$5,000 ceiling. Justice Africa would have first right to publish the work upon completion.

Proposals in the first instance should be sent to Alastair Roderick-alastair@justiceafrica.org by 1 December 2006, for starting in the following two months with a completion date of April 2007.

Suggested Research Background Reading

- Abusing the User: Police Misconduct, Harm Reduction and HIV/AIDS in Vancouver. Human Rights Watch (May 2003) 15.2B. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/canada/canada0503.pdf>
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- 'Fanning the Flames: How Human Rights Abuses are Fueling the AIDS Epidemic in Kazakhstan'. Human Rights Watch (June 2003) 15.3D. <http://hrw.org/reports/2003/kazak0603/kazak0603.pdf>
- 'Ravaging the Vulnerable: Abuses Against Persons at High Risk of HIV in Bangladesh'. Human Rights Watch (August 2003) 15.6C. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/bangladesh0803/bangladesh0803.pdf>
- 'Injecting Reason: Human Rights and HIV Prevention for Injection Drug Users'. Human Rights Watch (September 2003) 15.2G. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/usa0903/usa0903print.pdf>
- Koester, S. (1994) "Copping, running, and paraphernalia laws: Contextual variables and needle risk behavior among injection drug users in Denver." Human Organization, 51: 287-295.
- Locked Doors: The Human Rights of People Living with HIV/AIDS in China. Human Rights Watch (September 2003) 14.7C. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/china0803/>
- Maher, L., & Dixon, D. (1999) "Policing and public health: Law enforcement and harm minimization in a street-level drug market." British Journal of Criminology, 39: 488-511.

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