

HIV/AIDS and Children

Quoting the landmark 2004 **World Bank** report, *Reaching Out to Africa's Orphans*: “the number of orphans [in Sub-Saharan Africa] is growing at an alarming rate” . . . “resources are limited” . . . and “there is still no blueprint on the best way to scale up interventions.”

America is perhaps best known for freedom and enterprise. Europe is revered as the cradle of Western culture. Asia is recognized for its economic ascendancy. **But what of the largest continent on Earth?**

When noticed by its continental neighbors, Africa is usually associated with civil war and HIV/AIDS. By and large, the rest of the world chooses to look the other way. There are some exceptions, of course:

- ❖ UNICEF, UNAIDS, the U.S. Agency for International Development and The World Bank;
- ❖ Non-governmental organizations like SOS-Kinderdorf International, FOCUS, COPE, CARE, Save the Children, World Vision, Plan International and the Nelson Mandela Foundation;
- ❖ And there are latter-day Dr. Livingstons such as Dr. Mark Ottenweller of Hope Worldwide Africa and Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders).

However, the situation in Africa today is unprecedented in human history. So grave are its troubles that even the foremost international agencies, organizations and individuals seem stymied. What are the facts?

While new African nation states arise from tribal fiefdoms, there is continuing unrest; and genocides flare, like those in Rwanda, Sudan – and Uganda, where 2 million people had to flee their homes before an army of “child soldiers” forced into service by a man proclaiming himself to be the Messiah.

Perhaps only from exhaustion, Africa’s civil conflicts may be subsiding. There are fewer uprisings and more efforts to resolve tribal and racial tensions. The hopeful prognosis is that

What Is HIV/AIDS?

AIDS is a condition that suppresses the body's immune system, lowering one's resistance to infection, cancer and diseases such as Tuberculosis. AIDS is caused by a virus called HIV. It is believed to have started when hunters were exposed to the infected blood of a subspecies of African chimpanzees which, for some as yet unknown reason, do not contract AIDS⁴.

HIV is passed from person to person via body fluids. For example, infected pregnant women can pass HIV to their babies during pregnancy or delivery, as well as through breast feeding. Scientists believe that only blood or other body fluids – not insect bites or environmental sources of disease – transmit HIV⁵.

Not all HIV-infected people develop AIDS. Prior to 1996, scientists estimated that about half the people with HIV would develop AIDS within 10 years after becoming infected. Since then, Highly Active Anti-Retroviral Therapy (HAART) drugs have been introduced that greatly slow the progression time between HIV infection and the development of AIDS.⁶

most African countries will remain stable, including the two bellwether nations of Nigeria and South Africa¹.

But what of the HIV/AIDS pandemic raging throughout Sub-Saharan Africa?

AIDS is another matter. Things are going to get worse before they get better:

- ❖ There were some 40 million people worldwide infected with HIV as of 2005. Two-thirds of those (some 26 million) live in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- ❖ The estimated number of people in Sub-Saharan Africa infected with HIV daily: 8,500. The number dying of AIDS-related diseases daily: 6,300.
- ❖ Children orphaned by AIDS worldwide (as of 2003): some 15 million. Of these, more than 12 million were in Sub-Saharan Africa.²

Add to those the number of children orphaned or otherwise placed in harm's way by sporadic civil strife, and the situation may seem hopeless. But if you look into the eyes of the children most at risk, you know there is hope.

AIDS is not invincible. Human tyrants can be conquered. But can HIV/AIDS be controlled and overcome? Yes, it can. Consider the following facts:

- ❖ HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is transmitted by body fluids – and apparently *only* body fluids. Through careful sanitary and hygienic precautions, transmission of body fluids can be prevented.
- ❖ Not everyone who is infected with HIV develops AIDS.
- ❖ Through the use of antiretroviral (ARV) medications, HIV/AIDS can be reduced from a death sentence to a manageable “chronic illness”.
- ❖ Of course, no one can save all of the children. But we can save many, and above all else, they will know that we love them and we are trying. Consider the words of Nomfumaneko Yako, a 15-year-old South African girl who died of AIDS in 2004:

“I am very weak. It is difficult for me to walk even a few steps. My family is supporting me. They come to sit with me every time I take my medication. I feel very happy because they show me that they really love me.”³

Nomfumaneko was an orphan. Her parents died of HIV/AIDS before her, and her extended family cared for her. Many African orphans aren't so fortunate. Their extended families are stretched too thin, and/or public services are insufficient.

Can we win this war? Through patience, prayer and scientific research, a cure for HIV/AIDS ultimately will be found. Until then, a war of attrition must be waged.

ICAN intends to attack HIV/AIDS at its source. Today, in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, we are establishing the “blueprint” for interventions referenced by the World Bank. As our blueprint gains traction, we will enlist allies (all the agencies, organizations and individuals named above and more) to join with us in an all-out campaign to rescue AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

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1. The Economist, “The Good News in Africa”, *The World in 2005*.
 2. The World Bank, Reaching Out to Africa's Orphans, 2004.
 3. National Geographic, “A World Distorted by AIDS”, *September 2005*.
 4. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, “NIAID-Supported Scientists Discover Origin of HIV-1”, *January, 1999*.
 5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “HIV and Its Transmission”, *July, 1999*.
 6. Ibid., “HIV/AIDS Fact Sheets”, *December, 2003*.

ICAN is a ‘501(c)(3)’ not-for-profit organization. However, our strategy is based firmly on a free-enterprise model in order to help Africans – and especially African children – survive and prosper in the years ahead. If you would like more information about our vision, mission and progress, please contact us via E-mail at: BPeters@ICANinfo.org.

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