**Aids in Africa**

Iulia Pariniuc

Stoneleigh-Burnham School

AIDS is becoming one of the most important problems of the modern world. According to “AIDS Epidemic Update 2000” and the World Health Organization (WHO), the current number of people living with HIV or AIDS is 36.1 million, more than 50% higher than predicted in 1991. And this number is increasing every day, hour and minute. The greatest number of inhabitants sick with AIDS or HIV live in Africa. Over17 million Africans have already died of AIDS-three times the number of AIDS deaths in the rest of the world, orphaning 10 million or more African children. “The AIDS situation in Africa is catastrophic and sub-Saharan Africa continues to head the list as the world’s most affected region,” said Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS. According to his report, estimated 3.8 million people became infected with HIV in sub –Saharan Africa during the year, bringing the total number of people living with HIV/AIDS in the region to 25.3 million, or almost a million more than in 1999.

 The reason of such great spread of the disease is inadequate level of living and absence of needed education. According to WHO, more than 50% of African population does not live a safe sexual life, and the increase of number of drugs deteriorate the problem. For example, according to Ministry of Health statistics, 2.2 million Kenyans are ill with HIV, with average 500 deaths every day.

African medics do not want to show medical results to their patients and to the government. They say that they do not reveal HIV results to prevent the patients from fear of bad news. “Some patients literally die hopelessly before their eyes”, they said. “Another problem is that when some patients learn they are HIV positive, they go on their rampage, despite the counseling we give them, said Matulumbu, an HIV/AIDS specialist. The doctor, like his colleagues, said a number of patients even took loans while others mortgaged family assets to use the money to spread the disease. Such patients left their families double dilemma. Dr. Matulumbu said: ”We are facing a serious problem because medics are not trained on how to counsel HIV patients, yet we are expected to be a counselor and a doctor at the same time.”

The patients, HIV and AIDS positive express discontent about the doctors curing them. If the owner of the factory, a sick African is working for, finds out that the worker is sick, he automatically dismiss him from his work job. The owners of the companies do not want to deal with insurance of sick workers, and do not want to employ HIV/ADIS patients. The reality is sad, but it is true. Patients hide their results of HIV/AIDS tests, and it is difficult to determine the number of sick Africans.

AIDS is not a disease that can be either determined or cured. The real number of people with HIV positive is not known. Some of them do not want to talk about the disease, others simply do not know they are sick.

 To help in preventing AIDS, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in his speech at UN conference for Least Developed Countries, proposed to organize a global AIDS fund to sponsor the fight against AIDS. The world’s wealthy nations are allegedly holding off donations to a proposed UN global health fund, arguing, there are not enough guarantees that the money would be spend correctly, the Associated Press said on May 19, 2001. Reporting from the UN conference for Least Developed Countries in Brussels, AP said that "many countries" remained skeptical about UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposed US $7-10 billion fund to fight the spread of AIDS and other infectious diseases. It quoted Poul Nielson, the European Union's (EU) development commissioner as asking: "What will this fund do better than what we are doing now?". "If we are just talking about a global AIDS fund, we will not participate. It is too narrow," he added. The EU reportedly wants the fund to include other transmittable diseases and tie it to providing cheaper drugs for poorer countries.

The United States is the only large country to contribute to the global fund so far, pledging US $200 million last week. That contribution was criticized by, among others, the US-based Health Gap Coalition as "paltry". The coalition called for Washington to allocate US $2 billion in new money. (See www.healthgap.org)

 Annan said on Thursday in Geneva that the proposed fund would be a major tool for economic growth in the developing countries. He said that plans for the fund are progressing. He noted that the fund should be governed by an independent board, made up of stakeholders including governments from both donor and developing countries, NGOs, the private sector and the United Nations. The running of the fund should be done through a small secretariat, which would draw on a technical advisory body made up of international experts in the fields of health and development. Addressing concerns that the proposed fund would pull money away from existing health programs, Annan stressed that the fund must be additional to existing funds and mechanisms, not just a new way of channeling money that is already earmarked for development.

 Although working, the efforts of the United Nations are not enough without actual financial support they ask for. There is still a great need in money and people to fight AIDS in African countries. The UN pledges for the support from economically developed countries to help less developed ones. It is extremely important that the society fights this crucial disease, for it does not belong only to Africans, but to all the inhabitants of the earth. Therefore it is everyone’s problem. People with HIV/AIDS did not choose to be sick. It is time to start helping them before it is too late.