

AU, UN agencies launch HIV prevention acceleration in Africa

The African Union (AU) and the UN system in Africa on Tuesday launched "the Acceleration of Prevention of HIV Initiative in the African Region."

"Africa must now seize the moment to stop HIV," AU Commission Chairperson Alpha Oumar Konare said at a launching ceremony, held at the AU headquarters.

"There are several proven interventions in the area of prevention, we have a secure and growing knowledge base to do the job, and there is unprecedented political commitment and increased funding to translate plans and programs into services for our people," Konare told the participants.

The AU Commission and the UN agencies agree that acceleration of HIV prevention deserves more serious attention in line with the goal of universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care by 2010.

WHO regional director for Africa, Luis Sambo, said the launch should serve as "a wake-up call" for Africa to take concrete measures to stop all forms of HIV infection.

"We must promote widespread awareness of HIV and how it is caused, and media campaigns and education are the best ways to do this. Africans must embrace HIV counseling and testing; while governments, in collaboration with partners, must work together to ensure wide availability of HIV prevention services, together with anti-retroviral therapy," said Sambo.

According to UNAIDS, HIV and AIDS pose the greatest threat to security and development in Africa.

A statement by WHO Africa Region (WHO/AFRO) said the launch is a follow-up to the decision by African ministers of health in 2005 to declare 2006 as a "Year for Acceleration of HIV Prevention" in the region.

Since the pandemic broke in the 1980s, 50 million people have been infected in Africa, with 22 million deaths, while infant mortality, which had fallen by 50 percent between 1960 and 1990, has risen again.

Life expectancy in some countries in the region has also plummeted to 32 years, gross domestic product (GDP) in one country has dropped to one percent, while agricultural production in another is projected to drop to 24 percent by 2010.

Africa currently has some 12 million AIDS orphans, and this could rise to 19 million by 2010.

Source: Xinhua