

By Dorah Nesoba

The Armed Forces are losing at least six to ten soldiers per week to HIV/Aids and are among the most vulnerable groups.

Vice Chief of General Staff, Lt Gen John Koech, said the effects of the disease is causing loss of continuity at command level and within the ranks and in turn increasing the costs of recruitment and training of replacements.

He said the situation had called for the establishment of an Aids Control Unit at the Department of Defence (DoD). "Although we fall under the Office of the President, we need to have a separate ACU here at DoD because the scourge is taking its toll on the Armed Forces and we need to act from within".

Koech further lamented that 50 to 60 per cent of the bed occupancy at the Forces Memorial Hospital is by patients with HIV/Aids-related infections.

He was speaking at the DoD during the launch of the Aids Control Unit (ACU) Department of Defence.

He said at least 6,000 people have been tested at the Forces Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centres (VCTs) which advocate for privacy as patients do not disclose their names. At the launch, two officers who tested positive in 1999 and 2000 appealed to Kenyans to visit a VCT to establish their HIV status.

Sergeant Owiso Mbaja and Lance Corporal Musa Otura said they have lived positively after finding out they were infected unlike some of their colleagues who continued engaging in risky behaviour and have since succumbed.

National Aids Control Council Director Dr Margaret Gachara said such losses reduce military preparedness, internal stability and external security. She said 80 per cent of new HIV infections are among those aged between 15 to 49 years who are the economically active age group.

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