

Africa - [US]

HIV-AIDS Rife In Namibia Defence Forces

Windhoek, Namibia (PANA) - Close to one-third of Namibia's 15,000-strong National Defence Force is infected with HIV-AIDS, the government has acknowledged Friday.

Namibia's Minister of Defence, Erkki Nghimtina, revealed said that evidence demonstrates a high prevalence of HIV-AIDS among the uniformed men and women than in the civilian population.

This is despite a denial about the extent of the disease among the uniformed population.

Nghimtina said soldiers and military officers have become vulnerable to the virus that causes AIDS as a result of specific operational factors such as mobility, stress, carelessness and alcohol abuse.

The Minister made the remarks at a four-day military policy seminar on HIVAIDS at the coastal town of Swakopmund.

"We are seeing frequent burial services, our hospitals record more unfitness for combat activities and sick leaves are on the increase," he cautioned.

The situation poses security risks, the minister stressed. Nghimtina observed that the report is just a tip of the iceberg as HIV-AIDS is apparently yet to project its ugly manifestation among the military population.

He acknowledged the legal and human rights aspects associated with HIV-AIDS that made it difficult to resolve.

The pandemic requires solutions that are socio-economic and development oriented which are beyond the reach of the poor countries in the region, Nghimtina noted.

The Government of Namibia made health care as number two priority on its agenda behind education and training, as part of its poverty alleviation efforts, he noted.

Nghimtina said the prevalence of HIV-AIDS among the military population in Namibia and elsewhere in the region is not yet established, but military forces have been unwilling to open up in this regard.

He urged rich countries to back up the formulated policy with development aid, information exchange, poverty alleviation projects, education and training as well as minimum package including grants to enable poor countries buy the essential required anti-retro-viral and opportunistic infection drugs.

The Sub-Saharan region is more infected and consequently dying of HIV-AIDS and related diseases, largely because of socio- economic and development negative factors, he pointed out.

Namibia is among the highly risk HIV-AIDS in the Southern African region with an infection ratio of one in every four people, according to latest statistics from the nation's Ministry of Health and Social Services.

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