

US

**11% of Nigerian soldiers in Ecomog are HIV-positive - president**  
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About 11 percent of Nigerian soldiers in the west African peace-keeping force (Ecomog) are infected with HIV, President Olusegun Obasanjo has revealed.

During a tour of military installations in Benin city, south of Nigeria on May 18, President Obasanjo said that the situation was giving his government "very great concern".

"Information reaching me shows that about 11 percent of our soldiers who just returned from Sierra Leone and Liberia [where they undertook peacekeeping duties] have tested positive to AIDS," he told officers and men of the supply and transport barracks in Benin.

"This is giving us great concern. The country needs the services and experiences of the groups of young soldiers. A healthy military is the pride of the nation", the president said.

The president's statement marked the first time any government official would put a figure to the HIV prevalence in the country's armed forces, which in the past nine years has been intensively involved in peacekeeping duties in neighbouring states of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Last December, vice president Abubakar Atiku had described the military's HIV prevalence as "grave", but declined to give figures.

Between 30 000 and 50 000 Nigerian soldiers are believed to have been involved in Ecomog operations in the past nine years.

At the peak of the instability in Liberia for example, up to 10 000 troops were stationed in that country for periods of six months, before being replaced by a fresh batch.

In April, military authorities gave a hint into the state of the pandemic when it announced that it had sent 30 of its returnee Ecomog soldiers to an Abuja-based medical practitioner who claims to have developed a cure for AIDS. The army command claimed that all the soldiers were cured.

Since 1993, the military command has created an Armed Forces Programme on AIDS Control (AFPAC), but the exact seroprevalence in the armed forces had never been made public.

*from MISAnet/The Post*

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