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## Scaling up Parliamentary Efforts for Children and AIDS

Lilongwe, Malawi, 7-8 September 2005

### Parliamentarians move vulnerable children to top of agenda

**Parliamentarians from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe will try to scale up measures to help children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. The legislators said they would advocate for several measures, such as improving registration of newborns, providing low-cost antiretroviral drugs and channelling resources directly to communities and families supporting AIDS orphans.**

The series of measures, which vary per country, were agreed upon at the regional seminar “Scaling up Parliamentary Efforts for Children and AIDS”, held in Lilongwe, Malawi on 7 and 8 September 2005<sup>1</sup>. Parliamentarians gathering at the meeting, which was organised by AWEPA and UNICEF, emphasised that a lot more can be done to help HIV/AIDS affected children. They also pointed out that parliamentarians have a key role to play in unleashing efforts - and resources – aimed at helping the youngest generation of Africans affected by HIV/AIDS.

Discussions at the meeting focussed on making the National Plans of Action (NPA) for Orphans and Children made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS (OVC) more effective. Although the three countries represented by MPs at the seminar – Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe - have such a National Plan of Action in place, implementation seems to be lagging behind. The MPs in particular tried to find ways to revitalise the action plans by linking them to efforts aimed at poverty reduction.

<sup>1</sup> Similar regional seminars took place in Cape Town on 26 and 27 May 2005 and are planned to take place in Nairobi on 10 and 11 November 2005 and in Maputo on 28 - 30 March 2006.

Among other things, the parliamentarians said they would seek ways to be better informed about the stages of implementation of the plans and would contribute to help disseminate information about OVC issues to all relevant stakeholders, including at the local level. ■

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## “MPs are instrumental in accelerating the response to the AIDS crisis”

**In her opening speech, Ms. Aida Girma, UNICEF representative in Malawi, said MPs can do a lot to help children affected by AIDS. The prospects of the AIDS crisis in Africa are bleak, but parliamentarians have the power to help curb the trend, she pointed out.** “Across the world, more than 15 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents due to AIDS and millions more live with sick and dying family members. Eight out of ten of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa,” Ms. Girma said.

The UNICEF representative stressed that MPs don't need to start from scratch. They can build on previous initiatives. In September 2004, for instance, parliamentarians from 25 African and 15 European countries met in Cape Town and agreed to help accelerate the response to the crisis of children made vulnerable by AIDS through a plan that came to be known as Cape Town Declaration. It called for the design and implementation of costed National Parliamentary Action Plans to deal with the crisis HIV/AIDS has caused in the lives of millions of children and their families.

### Lack of funding

Although most countries in the Southern African region now have a National Plan of Action for OVC in place, lack of funding and weak human and institutional capacity hinder their implementation. “Parliamentarians can be instrumental in accelerating the implementation,” Ms. Girma stated. MPs

could promote the allocation of more money to programs for children affected by HIV/AIDS and they could also urge ministries to account for their actions to help end the crisis of orphans and vulnerable children.

### A new global campaign

Ms. Girma told the parliamentarians from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe gathered in Lilongwe, that UNICEF in October 2005 would launch the five-year “Global Campaign on Children and AIDS”. This campaign, she explained, is aimed at mobilising more resources to deal with the crisis. Organisers of the campaign hope to direct attention to four priority areas, called the “four Ps”:

- Primary prevention, with a focus on young people;
- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV;
- Paediatric care of children living with HIV/AIDS and
- Protection and care of orphans and other vulnerable children.



*Ms. Aida Girma*

There's also a fifth P, Ms. Girma added: Partnership. She added that parliamentarians should be partners in fighting HIV/AIDS and place children high on their national agendas and advocate for increased resources for implementation of the National Plans of Action. ■

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## Exchange between Africa and Europe helps MPs to find solutions to HIV/AIDS crisis



*Mr. Pär Granstedt*

**The HIV/AIDS pandemic has a profound effect on the whole fabric of society. When people in their 20's, 30's and 40's are killed in masses, also the most vulnerable - the very young and the very old - are in danger. That's why HIV/AIDS has been equated with war. It takes away the family supporters from the families, the teachers from the schools, the doctors and nurses from the hospitals, the farmers from the land and even the policemen from the streets, said Pär Granstedt, Vice-President of AWEPA, depicting the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa.**

As a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, large numbers of children grow up in child-headed households, without guidance of an adult. This is one of the greatest chal-

lenges the HIV/AIDS pandemic poses.

“The strong family networks have been the pride of Africa, and also a necessary means of survival in hard times. They still are to a large degree. But too often the toll of the

pandemic is such that these networks are being exhausted. Not only mother and father have passed away, but also granny, aunt and uncle. Or they have already so many to look after that they cannot cope any more," Mr. Granstedt explained.

To discuss what parliaments can do, parliamentarians all over the continent are meeting in workshops facilitated by UNICEF and AWEPA. The position of orphans and other vulnerable children was also dis-

cussed at the Pan-African Cape Town Conference in September 2004. In these series of seminars and workshops, African parliamentarians exchange experiences with their colleagues from the region, as well as from Europe. "We also hold meetings in European parliaments, with visitors from Africa," Mr. Granstedt said. "This is not only an African problem, it is global. Therefore discussions between continents are also necessary." ■

## Zambian MPs advocate for appropriation of funds to HIV/AIDS programmes

**Zambia faces a triple threat: poverty, HIV/AIDS and issues of governance. Currently, 67 percent of the population lives under the poverty line and unemployment is huge. "Budgetary allocations are insufficient to provide adequate social services, as more families slip under the poverty line," said Hon. Yamfwa Mukanga, the first presenter during the conference session on the role of MPs in promoting effective HIV/AIDS policies.**

Analyses of the situation regarding orphans and vulnerable children showed that there are 664,000 orphans under 15 years of age and over 1.1 million under 18 years. Ninety-two thousand Zambian children are infected with HIV/AIDS. As children get older, more are orphaned. By the age of 14, 31 percent of urban children and 27 percent of rural children had lost one or both parents, figures from a survey conducted in 2002 show. More than one third of Zambia's children live in "vulnerable households". These are households headed by grandparents, widows, sick or disabled people or by other children.

Although the support of the extended family is still very important, it is changing and has come under pressure. Over the past years, it has been noticed that families restrict support to close relatives only, which means the family of one's brothers and sisters. Wives are more reluctant to accept their husband's relatives and there is less support from richer members in the family for poor relatives. There is also less contact between urban and rural relatives. An increasing number of children are living without caregivers. Children on the street or in child-headed households are extremely vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

As a side effect of the HIV/AIDS and poverty crisis, less and less children have access to education. In the age-group 10-14, 25 percent of children do not go to

## "Regardless of ideology, support vulnerable children"



*Hon. Esther Chilenje*

**The HIV/AIDS pandemic is still increasing, causing damage of many children. "We are all mindful of the trauma that these children experience," said Hon. Esther Mcheka Chilenje, First Deputy Speaker of the Parliament of Malawi. "It is appalling to observe that most orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are failing access to facilities such as health care, education, food security and nutrition," she added.**

"There is a need therefore," Hon. Chilenje said, "that our parliaments, through their oversight, legislative and representation functions ensure that our governments are committed to the implementation of programmes to help orphans and other children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

Ms. Chilenje stated that MPs have the duty to address the problem of OVC regardless of their political affiliation or ideology. Helping to eradicate the stigma connected to HIV/AIDS in their constituencies is one of the contributions MPs could make, she pointed out. Increasing awareness is another area that requires more attention, she said. "Children lack knowledge about sexuality, sexual and reproductive health and information related to HIV/AIDS," she said.

### **A need for new insights and ideas**

The First Deputy Speaker also pointed at the importance of peace and stability, saying it is obvious that governments cannot effectively implement social or health care related plans when at war. Ms. Chilenje said the national workshops, which were planned as a follow-up to the regional conference, would hopefully provide new insights and ideas regarding fighting the effects of AIDS on the youngest generations. ■

school. The literacy rate of youth has decreased between 1990 and 2000.

#### **Measures taken in Zambia**

Zambia has tried to ease the lives of children affected by HIV/AIDS in several ways. It conducted an analysis of the situation of OVC in 2004 and strongly articulated the rights of children in a new draft constitution. The penal code has been amended to increase protection for children and women against abuse. After the landmark Cape Town meeting, Zambia decentralised its policy on OVC, giving greater autonomy for planning and implementation to communities. Other measures introduced over the past few years include free primary education, aimed at increasing access to education.

#### **Zambia's National Plan of Action for OVC**

Zambia also developed a National Plan of Action (NPA) for OVC for the period of 2006-2011. The plan will be integrated in the National Development Plan. It enjoys input from a large number of ministries and advisory groups, to ensure that a wide range of policy areas is taken into account, such as education, agriculture, health, social protection, gender and HIV/AIDS. The Zambian NPA identified five multi-sectoral strategies:

- Strengthen the capacity of families to protect and care for OVC by protecting the lives of parents, and providing economic, psychosocial and other support;
- Mobilise and support community-based responses;
- Ensure OVC have access to education, health care, birth registration and other essential services;
- Ensure governments protect the most vulnerable children through improved policy and legislation, and by channelling resources to families and communities;
- Raise awareness at all levels through advocacy and social mobilisation to create a supportive environment for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS.

According to the plan, essential care and support should have reached approximately 67 percent of the neediest OVC by 2011. The number of OVC most in need was estimated to be 791,236 out

of a total population of OVC of 1,180,000. During the first year of the plan, authorities will spend US \$ 245 per OVC (US \$ 58.2 million to reach about 30 percent of OVC) and by 2011 approximately US \$ 181 million per year, or US \$ 305 per vulnerable child. By then, 75 percent of OVC should have been reached through help programmes.

Mr. Mukanga pointed out that the Zambian authorities are also working on plans to ensure more infected children will have access to antiretroviral drugs (ARV). He said MPs would also advocate for appropriate budgetary allocation for the implementation of plans and policies aimed at vulnerable children. ■

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## Parliamentarians not only adopt laws, they are also role models



*Hon. Shuvai Ben Mahofa*

**The Parliament of Zimbabwe over the past decade adopted several laws addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic but several amendments are still to be made. Parliamentarians should use their position as role models to help reduce discrimination and stigmatisation of HIV/AIDS affected people.**

In Zimbabwe, 24 percent of the population are living with HIV and AIDS. Half of the new infections are among young people aged 15-24 years. Out of 1,820,000 people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in 2003, 165,000 were children under the age of 15. The latest available figures indicate that Zimbabwe had about 900,000 AIDS orphans by the end of 2005.

Over the past few years, the Parliament of Zimbabwe has enacted a number of pieces of legislation to try and protect the rights of children, especially of children affected by HIV/AIDS. "A number of laws need to be amended or harmonised to ensure vulnerable children are fully protected," Hon. Shuvai Ben Mahofa, Zimbabwean MP, pointed out in a presentation on the HIV/AIDS situation in her country.

#### **National AIDS Council**

One of the major steps taken to address the HIV/AIDS crisis was the establishment of the National AIDS Council (NAC) in 1999. A year later the government set up the National AIDS Trust Fund to provide funding for the National AIDS Council's activities. NAC's operations are decentralised. There are various committees at the provincial, district and village levels, which oversee the disbursement of financial assistance from the National AIDS Trust Fund. The money is spent on prevention, care and support, mitigation, home based care. Recently, the NAC together with the National Task Force, developed a National Monitoring and Evaluation System and indicators for the HIV/AIDS national response. This system helps in assessing whether orphaned children and their needs are taken care of.

Several new laws regarding inheritance have been adopted. This is a contentious area because there is conflict between customary and common law. Customary laws exclude girls from being appointed heirs if there is no testament. This is

a major problem for children losing one or both parents, especially when a girl needs to take over care. "Common law stipulates equal treatment, but customary law promotes the opposite," Ms. Mahofa said. "However," she added, "it has to be acknowledged that cultural practices and traditional beliefs do not change overnight. As individual MPs we play a critical role, through advocacy and awareness programmes, in our constituencies, to highlight the challenges these children face, when they are being treated according to customary law."

MPs should ensure that parliament votes for a child-friendly national budget that allocates more resources to the social sectors, she stated. The health sector has not yet received the 15 percent quota of the national budget as stipulated in the Abuja Declaration. MPs should lobby for an increase of the health budget, Hon. Mahofa said.

#### **Speak openly**

Parliamentarians should speak openly about HIV/AIDS to break

down taboos. "We play a pivotal role in breaking down the walls of discrimination and stigmatisation," Ms. Mahofa pointed out. This can be done in a variety of ways. In 2004, a group of MPs from the Parliamentary Committee on Health went for voluntary HIV/AIDS counselling and testing, as a way of raising public awareness and breaking down the walls of stigma and discrimination. Parliament of Zimbabwe has also set up Constituency Information Centers in all constituencies to bridge the communication gap between MPs and their constituents. These centers can be used as a gateway through which MPs can communicate with the people on HIV/AIDS issues.

Parliamentarians not only play a critical role in the formulation of legislation, they are also role models. "Hence our personal and public life should bear testimony that we do not discriminate or stigmatise these children. Orphans are an integral part of any society and need to be given due recognition and attention," the MP said. ■

#### **Government action**

The Malawian government has done several things to address the problem. In 2001, it established the National AIDS Commission to coordinate the national response to HIV/AIDS. Resources from the international community as well as government allocations towards the fight against AIDS are channelled through this commission. "The role of parliamentarians in the context of the operation of the commission is to exercise oversight over the use of resources, in order to ensure that the beneficiaries are assisted adequately," Mr. Malewezi said. MPs in Malawi, through their Parliamentary Committee on Health and Population, scrutinise the use of resources meant for AIDS programmes.

The government launched a new national HIV/AIDS policy in February 2004. It emphasises the continuum from prevention, through care to treatment. As regards orphans and vulnerable children, the policy stipulates that the government shall ensure that the community and families caring for orphans are assisted and empowered with resources, services and skills to help them cope with the extra burden. The new policy requires the government to put in place mechanisms for the registration of births and deaths at the local level. It also stipulates that child-headed households must be supported. However, as parliamentarians we have noted that a policy without legislation lacks enforcement. The Parliamentary Committee on Health and Population, in consultation with the responsible government ministry, is working to facilitate enactment of HIV/AIDS legislation, or the amendment of existing laws to include HIV/AIDS issues".

Malawi in 2002 started a programme for distribution of antiretroviral drugs (ARV). Initially ARV were available at three centres only. By the summer of 2005 the number of health centres providing the drugs had grown to 59, catering to 23,000 patients. But the need for scaling up ARV distribution is huge. About 170,000 people nationwide need the medication. MPs should ensure that more resources from the national budget are channelled towards the fight against HIV/AIDS. A good start has been made in the

## **“Malawian MPs should support community-based organisations”**



*Hon. Justin Malewezi*

**In Malawi, close to one million people are diagnosed with the HIV virus and every day 300 more Malawians become infected. As a result of HIV/AIDS on average 190 children are orphaned every day. There are approximately one million orphans in Malawi and half of this number is due to HIV/AIDS.**

The main mode of infection among young children is mother-to-child transmission. Malawians are insufficiently aware that children can become infected during childbirth or as a result of breast feeding. Mother-to-child transmission is increasing. It is clear that more needs to be done to inform young couples about this risk.

Sexual abuse of children is another major mode of transmission among children. "We are only

since recently starting to acknowledge the full dimensions of the impact of HIV/AIDS in Malawi", Hon. Justin Malewezi said.

2005/2006 budget: 15 percent of resources has been allocated to the HIV/AIDS programme.

#### **Community-based organisations**

A large number of community-based organisations have been set up to provide care and support to vulnerable children. The ministry responsible for children affairs developed policies for orphans and vulnerable children and, secondly, childhood development programmes. These programmes enhance the capacity of families and the community to cope with the pressure created by the pandemic. The ministry has also trained 240 community child protection officers who have been placed in all constituencies to help MPs to monitor the situation of children. "All MPs have

the responsibility to take stock of the situation and act as a whistle-blower for malpractices that happen to children," Mr. Malewezi said. MPs should work to enhance the capacity of community-based organisations that provide care to vulnerable children, he added.

Malawi ten years ago introduced free primary education, which dramatically increased enrolment. Parliamentarians have a duty to ensure that the national budget is aligned with this huge demand in order to provide quality education to children.

MPs should also continue spreading messages that help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. "These include discouraging harmful traditional, cultural and social practices," according to Mr. Malewezi. ■

MDGs are important because they provide a mobilising framework for governments, parliament, civil society, the private sector and citizens towards a common goal," Mr. Lavoie said. The Millennium Development Goals influence national policy choices towards poverty eradication and provide a frame-



*Mr. Martin Lavoie*

## **"2005 has been a turning point"**

**The Millennium Development Goals are a strong foundation for creating effective OVC programmes. Parliamentarians have a key role to play in both helping to realise the Millennium Development Goals and providing help to vulnerable children, said Martin Lavoie, Advisor Parliamentary Reform, Elections, Justice & Human Rights at UNDP Regional Service Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa.**

The Millennium Development Goals, adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2000, address several special needs of Africa. Among other things, they seek to support and promote democratic political institutions and build capacity to fight HIV and other infectious diseases. "The

work for monitoring progress. In both areas, parliaments, by virtue of their constitutional responsibilities, have a key role. The MDGs, Mr. Lavoie added, also bind developing and developed nations. They make it even more relevant for organisations such as AWEPA, Parliaments of the Commonwealth and Parliaments of the Francophonie to facilitate exchange between legislators from the North and South.

2005 has been a turning point, according to Mr. Lavoie. At the G8 summit, major steps were made towards debt relief. At a summit on MDGs in New York later that year, Heads of States were expected to renew their commitment to the MDGs. In August 2005, delegates from 10 countries of Eastern and Central Africa attended the regional conference on MDGs in Kampala and agreed that MDGs should be fully integrated into regional and national policies. The 150 delegates also identified parliamentarians as key actors in bridging the gap between national policy processes and local strategies.



### Conference of Speakers of Parliament

The Second World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments would also be important for strengthening the role of parliamentarians in fighting HIV/AIDS and poverty, Mr Lavoie pointed out. Speakers and Members of Parliament from 132 countries gathering at this meeting, which took place from 7-9 September 2005 in New York, were planning to debate a draft declaration advocating a stronger role for parliaments in international relations. They would emphasise that parliaments are determined to call on the states to live up to their MDGs commitments.

Mr. Lavoie said the Cape Town Declaration adopted in September 2004 also gave a positive impulse to the realisation of the MDGs. "This is particularly true in the case of initiatives relating to HIV and AIDS and the specific actions that AWEPA members are taking in scaling up parliamentary efforts for children and AIDS by closely monitoring their respective countries' National Plans of Action. ■

## A multi-sectoral approach is in place in Malawi

**Several ministries and local youth organisations received funding for HIV/AIDS programmes as part of the World Bank-led 'Multi-country response to HIV/AIDS Program' in Malawi.**

The World Bank launched the Multi-country HIV/AIDS Program (MAP) in 2000 to scale up existing programmes in African countries. In her presentation to the seminar, Ms. Susanne Kraemer, HIV & AIDS Mainstreaming Officer at the World Bank, Malawi, explained what the program has meant so far for Malawi. In addition to the World Bank, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Norway the government of Malawi funds the 'National Multi-Sector Response to HIV & AIDS in Malawi'. This plan is based on the "3 Ones" principles: one National Authority, one National Strategy and one National Monitoring and Evaluation system.

The national authority dealing with the programme is Malawi's

National AIDS Commission (NAC). The strategy consists of prevention, treatment, impact mitigation, sectoral mainstreaming, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation as well as creating national leadership and coordination.

### Grants were approved

For the years 2004-2005, grants were approved through the NAC to twelve ministries (US\$ 22 million) and a number of institutions and organisations (US\$ 11 million). About 17 percent of the grants were allocated to activities aimed at youth and another 16 percent to orphans. Youth groups used most of the money (72 percent) to develop prevention and advocacy activities. In addition, they ran programmes

to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS and activities in the area of treatment and support and capacity building. A small amount was spent on monitoring and evaluation.

Ms. Kraemer said the role of MPs in these kinds of efforts would be best aligned with the Cape Town Declaration commitments:

- Participate in awareness raising meetings to address the OVC crisis;
- Advocate for effective legal and policy frameworks;
- Secure resources for strengthening constituency outreach efforts;
- Develop media relations to reduce stigma and discrimination;
- Champion OVC rights by supporting child headed households. ■

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## "UNICEF supports implementation of action plans"



*Dr. Douglas Webb*

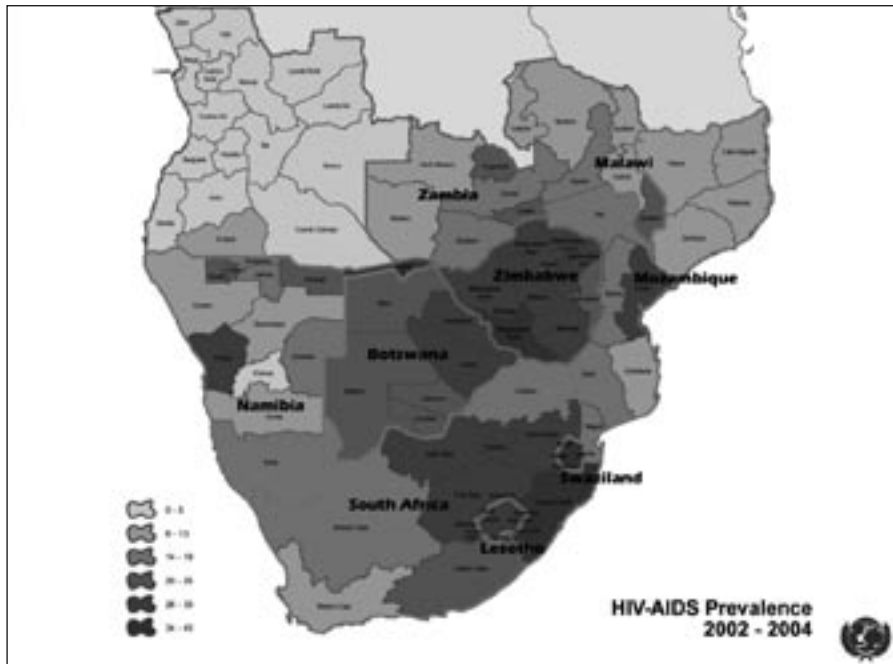
**Although the rates of AIDS-related orphaning are high in Africa, public support for orphaned and vulnerable children is very low, as it is in most parts of the world, according to Dr. Douglas Webb, Policy Advisor on Children and AIDS for UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO). Only 3 percent of funds earmarked for support for HIV/AIDS affected people are spent on children, a Policy Project Coverage Survey showed.**

The response to HIV/AIDS related problems among youth in sub-Saharan countries is increasing, however, Dr. Webb said. The National Plans of Action several African countries adopted are a case in point. These and other initiatives

gained another boost in July 2005 when the G8 industrial powers at a summit in Gleneagles stated they would work with UN organisations and other international bodies "to ensure that all children left orphaned or vulnerable by AIDS or other pandemics are given proper support." The G8 promised financial support through the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria and promised to actively work with stakeholders to implement the '3 Ones' principles in all countries.

### Cape Town Declaration

Mr. Webb emphasised that governance is crucial to find sufficient funding, optimise monitoring and find the best strategic outline for the National Plans of Action. He referred to the Cape Town Declaration as a point of reference regard-



reduction strategies. He added that NPAs should become integrated into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). Also, donors should better coordinate their support and funding. ■

## Reports back from Working Groups

Parliamentarians want to be better informed about ongoing initiatives aimed at supporting OVC and they want to bring this information and insight to the local level, in order to develop effective community programmes. These were among the key outcomes of the seminar's working group debates.

### Zimbabwe: Disseminate information on policies and legislation

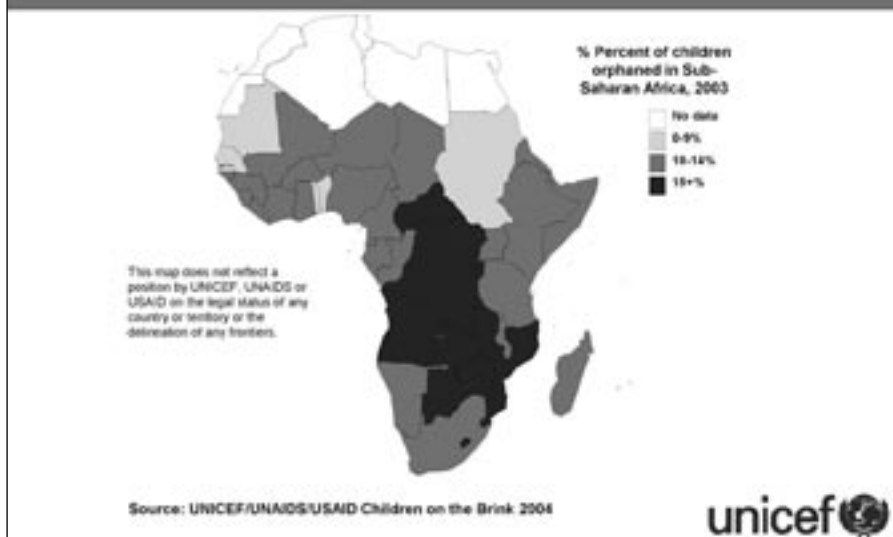
Members of Parliament from Zimbabwe assessed that key actors are insufficiently aware of the policies and programmes their country has put in place to help HIV/AIDS affected children. Parliament can do a lot to spread awareness and information, they concluded after a working group discussion.

Both at the national and grass root level, very few people know what policies and legislation one can build on to support vulnerable children, the MPs stated in an overview presented after the working group debates. Even MPs are often not aware of relevant measures and legal structures. The provisions of the National Plan of Action for OVC, for instance, are little known among MPs, they said.

The Zimbabwean parliamentarians said they would write a report of the seminar and table it in their Parliament to provide an opportunity for extensive debate on the issue of OVC. They said they also favoured organising regular seminars for parliamentarians in order to create better understanding of national OVC issues.

At the local level, the MPs said more information should be provided on birth registration structures. Local communities should also have a say in drafting the new national HIV/AIDS strategy, they said. The MPs agreed they would advocate for appropriate budgetary allocation to support the NPA

### Rates of orphaning in sub-Saharan Africa are highest in central and southern Africa



ing the role of MPs in the process. The Cape Town Declaration stated several key goals national parliaments should seek to accomplish, he said:

- Provision of free primary education for all children and removing other barriers to school attendance ('positive emergency');
- Facilitation of support for community-based care for orphans and vulnerable children without care givers;
- Ensuring safe and effective interventions that increase access to HIV/AIDS treatments for mothers and children.

The Cape Town Declaration also calls on parliaments to establish

a specific portfolio committee to deal with OVC issues and to hold annual public hearings as part of a public outreach programme. MPs should also lobby for the implementation and funding of the national plans. Mr. Webb said that "the UN family" can support these processes.

He added that UNICEF in particular has a key role in scaling up support for OVC. The UN's children fund provides help to parliamentary committees and seeks to support the implementation of National Plans of Action. On the medium term, UNICEF hopes to support the mainstreaming of the action plans within macro-development processes, such as poverty



for OVC secretariat and ensure adequate staffing within the department of Social Welfare, a move aimed at curbing the weak involvement of relevant line ministries. A strong NPA for OVC secretariat would also enhance coordination of OVC programmes, they stated. The Zimbabwean MPs said they would also lobby both the Ministry of Finance through the Finance and Economic Budgetary Committee and donors for appropriate allocation to support a nationwide implementation of the National Plan of Action for OVC.

The majority of these initiatives will be taken by individual MPs and their public assistants, the national coordinator for the NPA for OVC and the chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Social Services.

#### **Malawi: Empower local communities**

Malawian MPs, like their counterparts from Zimbabwe, stressed they should do more to spread information about the issue of OVC. As a first step, they would approach the Ministry of Public Service and other relevant ministries to be fully briefed themselves about ongoing initiatives, including the level of implementation of Malawi's National Plan of Action for OVC. Subsequently, the MPs said they would support the department to disseminate information on policies and legislation to the grass root level.

The Malawian MPs said they would try to mobilise support for the local child protection committees and enable them to develop Community OVC Action Plans. Increasing awareness about the importance of accurate birth registration was another area the legislators of the host country identified as being crucial. In addition to this, the MPs promised they would try to give local communities a bigger role in developing the new national HIV strategy. "The new National HIV/AIDS Strategy should be drafted with community participation," they said.

#### **Zambia: Integrate NPA in development strategy**

Legislators from Zambia said they would actively seek to integrate the National Plan of Action into Zambia's 5th National Develop-

ment Plan. They announced they would hold a press conference upon arrival to share the outcome of the AWEPA meeting as a first step to get the NPA finalised and incorporated in the national development plan. The Parliamentary Committee on Health, of which several members attended the seminar, would take the lead in this effort but would also seek involvement of other relevant committees, such as the Committees of Sport, Youth and Child Development.

The Zambian MPs said the new Zambian Development Plan should have a separate chapter for youth and children. Among the policy goals, they mentioned compulsory primary education and providing of antiretroviral drugs for free. They also stated they favoured free, but compulsory birth registration and said they would request the relevant ministry to introduce legisla-

tion to realise this. Birth registration should be raised to at least 50 percent by 2011 from the current 9.6 percent, the MPs said.

Parliamentarians from Zambia said they would advocate for appropriate budgetary allocation for social protection measures, in order to ensure 200,000 vulnerable households would enjoy social protection by 2011. The MPs also stated they would try to raise awareness about the NPA at the local level and advocate for constituency data on children. In addition to this, the legislators attending the seminar emphasised the Parliamentary Committees on Health, Sport, Youth and Child Development as well as Economics should provide sufficient parliamentary oversight on the implementation of the NPA and the 'Children Chapter' of Zambia's National Development Plan. ■

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## **Special Thematic Workshop on Conflict and AIDS**

**Lilongwe, Malawi, 9 September 2005**

Immediately after the Seminar on Scaling up Parliamentary Efforts for Children and AIDS, a special workshop on conflict and AIDS took place. Conflict exacerbates the vulnerable position of children and worsens the HIV/AIDS pandemic through increased transmissions. The Special Thematic Workshop on Conflict and HIV/AIDS, organised by AWEPA, sparked discussions on the connection between conflict and HIV/AIDS.

Democracy seems to be the best way to resolve conflicts peacefully, said Mr. Pär Granstedt, Vice-President of AWEPA, in his introduction to the special workshop. "Democracy provides not only a structure for conflict management but also for peaceful change of power," he said.

The grand idea of democracy is that public affairs should no longer be based on 'the right of the strongest' but on human rights, Mr. Granstedt pointed out. Therefore, building systems for democratic government means building systems for peaceful conflict management. "That people have different views on how public affairs should be managed is a fact of life. The task of democratic engineers has been to construct systems that allow for the managing of unavoidable conflicts instead of them being determined through fighting and the display of force. The will of the people has to be reflected as best as possible," he said.

"A major instrument to do this is Parliament," Mr. Granstedt added. "Ideally, Parliament has a composition that reflects all the views and interests prevailing within the population."

Unfortunately, parliaments are not always functioning well. In order for parliaments to play their role as an instrument for peace, the following prerequisites must be fulfilled:

- An electoral system and elections that secure Parliament represents the different views and interests within a population;
- Transparency in public affairs and free debates;
- A constructive relationship between government and opposition based on mutual respect for each other's role;
- Conditions that facilitate a smooth transfer of power when demanded by the voters. This should include reasonable possibilities for the opposition to prepare for a government role. It should also include some form of security for those who leave government;
- Good contacts between MPs and their constituencies;
- Respect for the rights of the minorities. Majority interests are normally well looked after in a democracy, but especially in situations where an ethnic minority seems to be permanently out of government, there is a risk that

its interests are neglected. Securing minority rights is necessary to ensure Parliament is an instrument for peace.

AWEPA is conducting a research project on 'The Role of Parliaments in Conflict Management and Peace-building' financed by DANIDA (October 2004-July 2006). Next to desk research, culminating in a final report, three regional workshops are organised in Africa with parliamentarians, NGO activists and experts as well as regional dialogue activities with the Political Coordination Committee [1] and several consultation missions. The aim of the activities is to address regional cooperation and peaceful conflict management and to strengthen parliaments both at national and regional levels to encourage parliamentary involvement in conflict management and peace initiatives. The Research Project involves a unique combination of African political leaders and regional and non regional democratic institutions in a groundbreaking assessment of the role of Parliament in African conflict management and peace-building efforts. ■

conflict management, conducts pre-elections assessments with stakeholders and regularly consults organisations involved in conflict management.

CMAG consists of experienced individuals who identify several root causes of election related conflict. Certain characteristics of electoral systems might induce conflict under certain circumstances, as does the composition of electoral boards. The media and constitutional and regulatory arrangements also play a role. Pre-election conflicts are often related to voter registration, disputes about use of state resources during the campaign or disagreement on the date of the election. After elections, conflict might arise when, among other things, the results are contested, vote buying is suspected, or doubts arise about the security of ballot boxes. ■

## Creating a culture of peace in Southern Africa



Ms. Boemo Sekgoma

Parliamentarians of member states of SADC established a think-tank aimed at sustaining a culture of peace in the region in 2004. The SADC PF Conflict Management Group (CMAG) aims at mobilising the capacity of parliamentarians to help prevent and mediate election related conflict.

The role of CMAG is to provide expert guidance on the role of Parliaments in conflict management and peace-building at the regional and continental level. It also advises on the entry points for parliamentarians and the role of parliamentary diplomacy.

Ms. Boemo Sekgoma, HIV/AIDS officer of SADC PF, who spoke about the role and background of CMAG at the special workshop, pointed out that a key objective of the conflict management program

is to strengthen the capacity of SADC PF to mitigate election related conflict. The think-tank also works to build capacity among MPs and staff to Parliament on election related

## Conflict and AIDS are mutually reinforcing

**The relationship between AIDS and conflict is complex but mutually reinforcing and poverty and the gender dimension exacerbate both, said Dr. Martin Rupiya, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Security Studies. He called on MPs to become engaged in conflict resolution.**

One of the factors accelerating the spread of HIV infection during conflict is the presence of military forces. In conflict situations, Dr. Rupiya explained, the main perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation are armed forces or other armed groups. Soldiers are typically young, sexually active men who are likely to seek 'commercial sex'.

**MPs should be engaged in conflict resolution**

Conflict disrupts and destroys health care infrastructure. Attention is directed to state security and survival. Under these circumstances, normal health delivery has a low priority.

Africa has experienced several conflicts over the past few decades, both wars between states and

internal conflicts. At the same time, HIV/AIDS infection has reached a much higher level than in most other continents. A successful response to HIV/AIDS requires a wide range of activities, such as putting in place measures to prevent new HIV-infections and treating and caring for people living with HIV/AIDS. Mr. Rupiya said many governments in Africa only recently have been making progress in fighting HIV/AIDS. Often, a holistic, comprehensive approach is lacking. Parliamentarians could contribute, he stated, by engaging in conflict resolution, among many other things. "Success depends on adopting the right policy mix: Involvement in conflict resolution by parliamentarians; provision of cheap and affordable drugs; changes in sexual behaviour; creation of medical and other support structures," Mr. Rupiya said.



*Dr. Martin Rupiya*

HIV/AIDS poses a significant threat to the integrity and effectiveness of both the private and public sector in Africa. Therefore appropriate policy frameworks that are evidence-based and tied to implementation plans should be adopted, he added. ■

## Taking HIV/AIDS into account during emergency situations

**The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), an international body that coordinates humanitarian assistance, has introduced HIV/AIDS as a strategic consideration in emergency situations, Dr. Douglas Webb, Policy Advisor on Children and AIDS, UNICEF ESARO, pointed out during this special workshop.**

HIV and conflict are closely linked, Dr. Webb explained. Of the 17 countries with more than 100,000 children orphaned by AIDS, 13 are in conflict or on the brink of an emergency that could generate conflict. In the DRC, the African country with the longest ongoing war, some 680,000 children have lost parents to AIDS. In northern Uganda, rebel forces have sexually abused thousands of girls. By 1997, soldiers had three times the HIV prevalence rate of civilians.

HIV/AIDS is not only closely linked to conflict but also to food security, Mr. Webb stated. Food insecurity and poor nutrition worsen HIV/AIDS by increasing the likelihood of HIV infection and the speed of transmission from HIV to

AIDS due to high risk behaviour people engage in to access food, such as prostitution, increased mobility and migration. HIV/AIDS increases food insecurity by reducing food and non-food production. A negative economic multiplier effect and decimation of social safety nets occurs.

### **Enhance HIV/AIDS awareness among emergency aid workers**

Reducing HIV/AIDS in emergency situations requires a multi-sectoral approach. IASC recommends immediate education on HIV/AIDS and on child protection measures against sexual exploitation must be given to all personnel in the food aid distribution chain, such as truck drivers, food aid monitors and all NGOs. Harsh penalties should be introduced for offenders. Another intervention to reduce HIV/AIDS in emergency settings concerns an agreement on rations in areas of high HIV/AIDS prevalence as HIV positive people require more calories, proteins and micro-nutrients. Another intervention concerns the fact that food provisions should be part of a wider "package", which includes HIV/AIDS awareness, care and support components. To ensure uniformity, the IASC Task Force on HIV/AIDS has produced 'Guidelines for HIV/AIDS interventions in emergency settings'. ■

## European Action on Children and AIDS

### UK: International Development Bill

Rt. Hon. Mr. Tom Clarke, a parliamentarian from the British House of Commons and AWEPA member, is currently sponsoring a Private Member's Bill through the UK Parliament entitled the 'International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Bill'.

This Bill requires the Secretary of State for International Development to 'report annually on total expenditure on international aid and on the breakdown of such aid, and in particular on progress towards the target for expenditure on official development assistance to constitute 0.7 per cent of gross national income'. In addition, the Bill requests that the Secretary of State gives an assessment of progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goals 1 to 7. Although the Bill does not require the government to give specific details on aid for Children and AIDS, such a report on the MDGs will provide greater transparency of aid effectiveness in this area.

The Bill was amended in its Committee Stage on 15 February 2006, and is due to be considered by the House of Commons again on 12 May 2006.

## UK: House of Lords: 1 December 2005

In December 2005 Baroness Amos, the Leader of the House of Lords, was answered a Parliamentary question by AWEPA member Baroness Northover about the government's response to the UNICEF report: 'Children – the missing face of AIDS'.

In her response Baroness Amos stated that the UK was the first country to earmark funding for children affected by AIDS: £150 million from 2005-2008. She also noted that the UK was co-hosting the Global Partners' Forum on Children affected by HIV/AIDS with UNICEF in 2006. Baroness Amos agreed with Baroness Northover that the government needed to examine education programmes to encourage prevention of infection as well as treatment of HIV/AIDS.

When pressed further about the importance of prevention by Baroness Whitaker, an AWEPA Council Member, Baroness Amos confirmed that UK Department for International Development (DfID) is supporting a range of actions to help women negotiate safe sex. A key element of DfID's strategy is also to strengthen male involvement in prevention and behaviour change programmes.

## Belgium: Resolution on Sexual Violence in the DRC

On 25 November 2005 the Belgian House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The resolution stated that although in 2002 the DRC ratified the statute of the International Court which recognised the broad and systematic use of rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy and forced sterilisation as a crime against humanity and a war crime, these atrocities are still common.

Since the outbreak of war in 1996, 30-40,000 women and girls have been raped and thousands of other victims wounded as sexual violence



has been systematically used as a weapon of war. This has inevitably had an enormously detrimental effect on the population, and has resulted in psychic and psychological trauma, increased incidence of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, the stigmatisation of rape victims, and a loss of social norms and values.

The Belgian Parliament's resolution recognised that the DRC's government and civil society are making clear efforts to support rape survivors and end impunity, and asks the Belgian Federal Government to support this. Parliamentarians requested that special attention be given to the promotion of the legal position of women in the DRC and the protection of children's rights, especially those children who are born as a result of rape. The resolution also asked the Belgian government to 'prioritise the rebuilding of the national health system, giving special attention to the growth of sexual and reproductive healthcare services, including the prevention and care of HIV/AIDS and assistance to victims of sexual violence'.

The Belgian House of Representatives recommended that this matter is urgently advocated at both the European and United Nations level.

## Belgium: World Aids Day, 1 December 2005

Hon. Inga Verhaert, MP, Belgium, and AWEPA member, took part in the organisation of one of the World Aids Day events organised in Belgium on 1 December 2005. The event concerned took place at the Central Station in Antwerp, where a huge banner was unveiled displaying a slogan by the music

group Faithless: "AIDS is a weapon of mass destruction. Use a condom". The organisation "Designers Against AIDS" sold t-shirts with this slogan on them and the members of the socialist fraction wore this t-shirt in the Chamber that same day. After a press conference at the station, there were several radio and television programmes which paid attention to the different Belgian events on World Aids Day.

## Switzerland: UNICEF Children & AIDS day

On December 1, 2005, the Swiss parliamentarians and AWEPA members Hon. Brigitta Gadiant (President of AWEPA Switzerland), Hon. Pia Hollenstein, Hon. Rosmarie Zapfl and Hon. Erwin Jutzet (also Head of Foreign Affairs Committee) - together with Elsbeth Müller, Executive Director of UNICEF Switzerland - distributed pin-badges displaying the logo: «United for children - united against AIDS» as a statement of solidarity.

During this information day Hon. Brigitta Gadiant, who is also Vice-President of AWEPA, presented the Memorandum of Understanding between AWEPA and UNICEF to Federal Councillor Hon. Micheline Calmy-Rey (Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs), as well as a statement (postulate) she wrote to the National Council. In this postulate Hon. Gadiant asked for more attention to be given to children and their rights in the Swiss government's development cooperation policy. Focus should be given to the HIV/AIDS situation in Africa and the problems this causes. All Swiss parliamentarians received a dossier with information about the UNICEF Children and AIDS initiative.