

Virtual Mentor

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VIEWPOINT

AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa

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- During the French and Indian War (1754-1763), British Commander Jeffrey Amherst distributed smallpox-infected blankets to American Indians, an act now widely recognized as the first use of germ warfare. In a letter from Amherst to Colonel Bouquet dated July 16, 1763, Amherst approves of this tactic and any other methods to "extirpate this execrable race."
- United Nations Security Council recently adopted a resolution calling for more education about AIDS prevention to be given to UN peacekeeping troops, who have been carriers of the HIV virus, especially in Africa. Calls for mandatory HIV testing and counselling for troops prior to deployment were rejected by some member nations supplying troops on the grounds that such an intervention would violate their sovereign control over military policies.
- More than 24 million people living in sub-Saharan Africa are currently infected with the HIV virus. But, these prevalence estimates may be as high as 50 million people, since only 5% of those who carry the HIV virus are aware of the fact. So far, sub-Saharan Africa has more than 12 million orphans, many of them being reared by other children. It is predicted that by the end of this decade, more than 40 million African children will be orphaned by AIDS unless meaningful intervention is instituted.
- According to United Nation estimates, more than \$3 billion will be needed annually in Africa to make significant progress in HIV education, prevention, and care. The international community has only recently begun to confront the overwhelming magnitude of this human catastrophe with the United States offering sub-Saharan African nations \$1 billion in loans annually to finance the purchase of American AIDS drugs and medical services. This "aid" has been criticized since most African nations are already heavily in debt. Other nations, notably France, have contributed free drugs.
- In the West, current standards of HIV care for opportunistic infection prophylaxis and antiretroviral therapy can cost more than \$12,000 per year per patient, more than 24 times the average per capita annual income in many sub-Saharan African countries. Drug companies have begun to offer sharp price reductions for these medications, but the cost of providing these medications remain far out of reach of most of those infected with the disease.

- During the time that it took you to read this page, more than 10 people living in sub-Saharan Africa have become newly infected with HIV and at least 4 people have died of AIDS.

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