

Impact of HIV/AIDS on International Peace and Security

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Statement by German Ambassador Miguel Berger, Deputy Permanent Representative of the German Mission to the UN at the Security Council

Mr. President,

I would like to thank you for convening and personally presiding over today's meeting. We appreciate Gabon's initiative to bring the issue of HIV/ AIDS and international security to the attention of the Security Council again. Germany believes that the resolution introduced by Gabon is a significant step in tackling this important issue.

And I would particularly like to thank the Secretary-General and UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé for their insights.

Mr. President,

Eleven years after the adoption of the pioneering resolution 1308 of 2000, HIV/AIDS still constitutes a threat to international stability. HIV/AIDS is a phenomenon which affects individuals, families and their well-being at a very personal level, but it also impacts whole societies and sometimes regional and international security.

The risk of exposure to the disease continues to be especially high in conflict and post-conflict situations as well as during transition processes.

On the one hand, the epidemic destroys social structures and networks, thus creating more misery in already shaken societies and increasing the potential for social unrest. As a consequence, HIV and AIDS can be considered one of the causes of political weakness, fragility of states, and conflict aggravation.

On the other hand, conflict and tensions exacerbate the problem of HIV and AIDS within the society: International support, health education, access to prevention, adequate medication, hospitals and treatment for HIV patients ranges from difficult to nearly impossible in some conflict situations, thus causing a more rapid spread of the disease. As a result, the population is not only directly endangered by conflict, but also indirectly by the spread of diseases such as HIV.

Mr. President,

UNAIDS estimates that HIV/AIDS prevalence is three to four times higher among armed forces and armed groups than among the general population. As we know, women and children are often the main victims of conflict. Rape, which is all too often used as a weapon of war, also adds to the spread of HIV among civilians. HIV adds to the stigma and discrimination these victims of sexual violence oftentimes face.

In many conflicts, children are recruited and misused as soldiers, sexually exploited and abused. Under these conditions they are especially vulnerable to infection and therefore not only traumatized, but often also stigmatized for life. Germany is convinced that children deserve special protection in armed conflict and, if needed, must be provided with special HIV-related health care. We have set up a number of projects attending to former child soldiers and girls that have been sexually exploited by armed groups, including child mothers, and providing them with HIV counselling and care, for example in Eastern Congo.

In the post-conflict transitional phase the transmission of HIV constitutes a particular danger. There is high population mobility after conflict, when displaced persons find refuge in camps, refugees return home and combatants are demobilized. Infected persons pose a high risk of contagion to their extended families and communities. Germany considers it essential that voluntary testing and counselling be provided and anti-retroviral drugs supplied in order to prevent further spreading of the disease.

During transition processes, when governmental structures are not yet established or functional, it may be difficult to apply health programs or to develop and implement policies against HIV. An effective international response in providing and ensuring HIV related assistance may have to rely on the establishment of local health centers which provide direct assistance to the population. Germany is actively engaged in fighting HIV and AIDS on the local level and has established health centers in several African regions, including in the DRC.

Mr. President,

Security Council Resolution 1308 (2000) focused particularly on the potential of HIV/AIDS to impact the health of UN peacekeepers. Germany commends DPKO and UNAIDS for all the progress they have achieved in addressing HIV/AIDS among peacekeepers and uniformed personnel more generally.

However, it is clear that more needs to be done to reduce the number of HIV/AIDS-related deaths among peacekeepers. There has to be a continued emphasis on strengthening national HIV/AIDS prevention, counselling and treatment programs. We would encourage Member States to also develop more specific strategies for personnel participating in peacekeeping operations, including awareness raising and Voluntary Confidential Counselling and Testing.

In closing, Mr. President,

I would like to thank, once again, Gabon for having organized this debate which has clearly underlined that threats to international peace and security are multi-faceted. We believe that in this, as in other matters, the Security Council needs to adopt a broad strategy of conflict prevention, which addresses the root causes of conflict in a comprehensive manner.

Thank you.