

Africa Report by Mary Lalevée

AIDS will cause 'hecatomb'

Scientists meeting in Italy break the cover-up: At least 30-60 million Africans have AIDS!

There should be no illusions. There will be a hecatomb in Africa, due to the spread of AIDS, said Belgian AIDS researcher Nathan Clumeck at a conference held in Naples, Italy Oct. 8-9. "Africa is the mirror of our own destiny in the very near future," he warned.

Six hundred scientists and researchers attended the meeting, whose theme was the correlation between AIDS and tumors in Africa.

After more than two years of deliberate cover-up of the spread of AIDS in Africa, finally scientists are being forced to state the truth. The official line of the World Health Organization and the Atlanta Centers for Disease Control, that AIDS only affects "risk groups" and cannot be spread "casually," was attacked head-on by prominent scientists.

Specifically singled out for fire was a statement made in August by CDC spokesman Harold Jaffe, that "the people really exposed to danger remain only the homosexuals, the drug addicts, and hemophiliacs. Outside these categories, and therefore for the majority of the population, the eventuality of infection by the AIDS virus is virtually nil."

The Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* reported, "There was too much unwary optimism at that time. Yesterday in Naples, all the scientists agreed in contradicting this statement by Jaffe. . . . In Africa, AIDS is spreading everywhere, and especially among heterosexuals, something which has silenced Jaffe definitively."

The other hideous lie which was exposed, was the World Health Organization's line that AIDS was not

really a problem in Africa, that there were really only a few cases. In a discussion this writer had with the late Dr. F. Assad, spokesman for the WHO in Geneva in August 1985, he scoffed at my questions on the risk AIDS posed to Africa, saying, "Malaria, now that's a real problem, not AIDS!" At an international conference on AIDS held in Belgium, in October 1985, Soviet bloc representatives blackmailed African representatives into taking the same line.

The deliberate playing down of the threat AIDS poses to African populations, since it first became known, means that tens of millions more will die than need have done, had international action been taken to remedy the crisis in health, nutrition, and sanitation on the continent.

In Africa, in the very near future, *everyone* will risk infection with AIDS, reported speakers at the conference. French Prof. Luc Montagnier stated, "We have to correct the official picture. We have to estimate that the number of infected people on that continent is between 5 and 10%. This means there are *between 30 and 60 million people infected*. The real worry comes from another discovery. There are nations on the continent which were absolutely 'clean' up to three or four years ago, without one single case of AIDS registered. Now they are included in the pool of the worst-stricken countries like Zaire, Tanzania, and Uganda. This means that the transmission of the disease is taking place at *breathtaking speed*."

Zairean expert Dr. Kapita described official AIDS statistics as "an underestimate." The official figures of

5,826 cases of AIDS in Africa "must be taken with 'white gloves' [caution]. We don't know how many people there are in Africa infected with AIDS. At the same time, a census of infected people is very difficult to make. We estimate that there are more than 2 million people suffering from AIDS in Africa. But we are certain about some things. In 80% of the cases of infection with AIDS, the people affected are heterosexual, and not homosexual as in the United States, or drug addicts, as in some European or Latin American countries."

The question of the role of environmental factors was also raised, reported the Italian daily *La Stampa*. "Extreme poverty and the lack of sanitary conditions favor the spread of AIDS in Africa." The scientists reported that "the very grave social and sanitary situation in Africa, where there is already a very high death rate from other causes, like malaria, tuberculosis, hookworms, and leprosy—this very serious situation in Africa is a very fertile ground for incubation and spreading of this disease."

An explosive report by a group of German doctors on the situation in the Central African nation of Malawi was "precipitously withdrawn" from the conference, according to *La Stampa*. The report detailed a study of several hundred people in Malawi, described as "generally at risk of disease, but not members of risk groups for AIDS." Of these, a horrifying 56% were infected with AIDS, and 83% were carriers of hepatitis-B virus.

The implications for the future of Africa were described by Professor Clumeck. "What would be terrible," he said, "is if this hecatomb leads to a regression to a society made up of scattered villagers of survivors. We are heading toward considerable social and cultural upheavals."