

Sack minister - demands people living with HIV

UPROAR and widespread condemnation greeted remarks by Minister of Special Programmes Mrs. Esther Murugi that people living with HIV (PLHIV) should be isolated to curb the spread of the virus with members of the civil society, parliamentarians calling for her immediate sacking.

Nelson Otwoma, NEPHAK CEO, said her comments were highly irresponsible. "I wonder what was ringing in her head as she said what she said. Other than violating people's rights, such a suggestion creates stigma, even if not implemented." NEPHAK and other civil society organizations resolved to hold nationwide demonstrations during a crisis meeting.

He noted that NEPHAK feared the consequences of the minister's remarks as it will lead to high stigma and erode the gains already achieved. "...by end of next week we might not find anyone visiting VCTs all over the country for fear of stigmatization."

WOFAK reacted angrily and called for an immediate apology from the minister to the PLHIV and threatened to mobilize women all over the country to protest the unfortunate remarks.

The minister has also faced criticism from the first lady Lucy Kibaki, the Prime Minister Raila Oding'a, parliamentarians John Mbadi among others.

The minister is quoted as saying on 28 January at a meeting with MPs on HIV/AIDS, "In Cuba, when President [Fidel] Castro was still very strong, anybody who was tested with HIV and AIDS was actually locked somewhere and once you went in, you did not come out. I don't know whether we should be that drastic or what. But sometimes I think, that is what should do so that those who are ill are locked in."

The minister has since apologized to Kenyans over the remarks. Also attending the meeting were, United Nations country coordinator on HIV/AIDS Maya Harper and Speaker of National Assembly Mr. Kenneth Marende. The function was organized by the National AIDS Control Council (NACC), which is under the ministers docket, in partnership with the UN and Parliament.

Murugi was at the centre of a separate row linked in 2010, but on that occasion her comments in support of tolerance towards men who have sex with men (MSM) drew praise rather than criticism from AIDS activists.

While stigma towards PLHIV has reduced significantly over the years, change has been slow. A recent study showed a majority of respondents in Kenya felt that PLHIV deserved their positive status as a punishment for morally unacceptable conduct!

Kenya NGOs elect new officials

Over 400 members of the Kenya National NGO Council on 27th January elected their new chairman in a peaceful election at the Bomas of Kenya.

Mr. Ken Wafula, Executive Director for Centre for Human Rights based in Eldoret, beat his sole rival Dr Macmillan Kiiru the director of Tumaini Commiseration Initiative by 137 votes to 71. Former Juja MP, Mr. Stephen Ndicho and Mr. Davis Konchella pulled out of the chairmanship contest days to the elections.

The council members also elected 13 new officials to sit on the executive committee and four in regulatory committee for a three year term.

The election comes after a two-year court war that pitted the former Council chairman Dr. Semion Kanani against his arch rival George Wainaina. The new team takes over from the interim team elected in late November when the process aborted.

FACTBOX

Who We Are: NEPHAK is a national network that unites people living with HIV (PLHIV) and those co-infected by TB through community based organizations (CBOs), support groups, post-test clubs, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and networks in Kenya.

David Kato: Hero or Villain

Gay Ugandans say they are living in fear after the murder of David Kato, a prominent gay activist who opposed the Anti-Homosexuality Bill submitted to the Ugandan parliament in 2009. The possibility that Kato may have been killed because of his sexuality has made gay people feel very insecure.

Police say no suspects have been arrested and the motive for Kato's murder remains unclear; he was hit on the head with a stone at his home on the afternoon of 26 January.

A spokesperson for Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), while paying tribute to Kato for his dedication to the defense of the rights of sexual minorities in Uganda, urged the police to urgently investigate the murder and charge those responsible.

Kato actively campaigned against the [Anti-Homosexuality Bill \(2009\)](#), introduced by MP David Bahati. Kato described the bill as "profoundly undemocratic and un-African". The bill would impose the death sentence for the crime of "aggravated homosexuality."

HIV/AIDS activists have condemned the bill, noting that it would only serve to drive gay Ugandans further underground, away from HIV prevention, treatment and care. The Ugandan government classes men who have sex with men (MSM) as a "most at risk" population, but has no HIV programmes targeting them.

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) Director-General Dr. Gill Greer said, "In recognition of David Kato's life and courage, and the continued struggle of sexual minorities around the world, IPPF, together with other partners who are committed to eliminating violence, stigma and discrimination, plans to establish a fund to recognize the leadership of individuals who uphold the sexual rights of minority groups." RIP DAVID KATO.

"Epuka ukimwi" campaign successful?

The two-year-old 'Wacha Mpango Wa Kando: Epuka Ukimwi' campaign is ubiquitous; it is on TV, on radio and on billboards. But has it made married Kenyans - responsible for an estimated 44 percent of new infections annually - change long-held habits? The [campaign](#) is aimed at reducing the high rate of new infections occurring within marriage.

The impact of the campaign - developed by the government and Population Services International (PSI) - on behavior change has not been evaluated, but experts say it could be a long while before its message has a significant impact. The campaign is being heard; 'mpango wa kando' is a buzzword for relationships on the side, and people are now aware of the risks they are taking.

But with hundreds of Kenyans on social networks like Facebook and 2go forming groups seeking 'mpango wa kando' and popular radio shows featuring segments on cheating spouses, it is clear that the phenomenon of "the other woman/man" is far from over.

Nicholas Muraguri, head of the National AIDS and Sexually transmitted infections Control Programme (NAS COP) says that, results may be slow, but behavior change will happen eventually.