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UN Voices Alarm About Spread of HIV in Egypt

Number of new cases growing by 40 percent per year, with evidence of more cases among youth

By **Nariman El-Mofty**
Associated Press

CAIRO — The U.N. is voicing alarm over the spread of HIV in Egypt, where the number of new cases is growing by up to 40 percent a year, and where efforts to combat the epidemic are hampered by social stigma and a lack of funding to address the crisis.

The virus that causes AIDS, U.N. officials say, is infecting more young and adolescent people

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run by the Black Panther Party and "disrupt distribution of the BPP newspaper."

The documents exposed in the 1976 court case also revealed, "massive wiretap overhears, including conversations between BPP members and their attorneys," Taylor wrote.

"The FBI denies they are surveilling (sic) our groups like the Black Lives Matter movement, but we told them that we don't believe it and our information tells us that" those groups are under surveillance, said Richmond.

Richmond said that the CBC members plan to present information to the FBI detailing surveillance and harassment of Black organizers.

The FBI director expressed interests in meeting with CBC members regularly because, "We are the eyes and ears on the ground," and the CBC offers diversity that the CBC offers, said Richmond.

Bass asked the Black Press to put the call out to their readers to let lawmakers know if they have experienced harassment or surveillance, a request that Richmond echoed.

Chavis, the president and CEO of the NNPA, committed to working with Richmond and other CBC members to uncover stories of unwarranted government surveillance and harassment in the Black community.

"People may be more considerate in doing things, if they know that the Black Press will be on their case," said Leavell, the chairman of the NNPA. "In addition, it certainly shows our strength, if we can have a great impact."

than any other age group.

Egypt, home to some 95 million people, ranks behind only Iran, Sudan and Somalia in the Middle East for the rate at which the epidemic is spreading, according to U.N. figures. In Egypt, patients are often jailed on trumped up charges and ostracized by society. The disease is associated with homosexuality, which is not explicitly illegal but is widely seen as a transgression against religion and nature in the conservative, Muslim-majority country.

"There is a 25-30 percent increase in incidents every year... It's alarming to us because the growth of the epidemic and the discontinuation of interest from donors in funding," Ahmed Khamis, of the U.N. AIDS agency, told The Associated Press.

Estimates of the number of people living with HIV in Egypt vary. UNAIDS says there are over 11,000 cases, while the country's Health Ministry estimates the figure to be around 7,000.

The rise in the number of new infections, however, is not in dispute.



In this Saturday, Dec. 2, 2017 photo, from left to right UNAIDS country manager Ahmed Khamis, Christian father Boulos Soror, Dr. Walid Kamal, Islamic scholar and Sheikh Ali al-Jifri, and Tabah Foundation member Mohammed Shahin, prepare for an even part of the World AIDS Day 2017 national advocacy campaign at a hotel, in Cairo, Egypt. An alarming HIV epidemic is silently spreading in Egypt, with an annual growth of up to 40 percent and funds to deal with the crisis running out by next year, U.N. officials and activists say.

"Most recently, we've been seeing people of a much younger age group infected with the virus. There is a higher risk now for adolescents and youths than in the past," said Khamis.

"We don't have exact numbers, but this is what the evidence we are seeing on the ground is suggesting," he added, explaining that the lack of funds is hampering Egypt's capacity to produce precise figures.

Patients who require surgical intervention are often unable to access basic health care at

hospitals because of the associated stigma, UNAIDS officials said.

The virus can be spread through sexual contact, as well as contaminated needles or syringes, or blood transfusions. It can also be passed from infected women to their babies at birth or through breast-feeding. But in Egypt, the virus

is widely associated with homosexuality, which is seen by many Egyptians as a lifestyle choice.

In a recent conference on AIDS, Islamic scholar and cleric Ali al-Jifri spoke about the stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV and AIDS patients. "A person diagnosed with HIV is a human. We should never question their diagnosis," he told the conference.

A Christian priest, Boulos Soror, told the conference that Egyptians should accept others, regardless of their HIV status.

Shunned by society, it is not uncommon for patients to contemplate suicide.

Ahmed, 40, is one of them. He has been trying to gain asylum status in the U.S.

"I do not want to be living a life always feeling strapped down and imprisoned," he told his

therapist during a session attended by an AP reporter. Fearing further stigma, he asked that he be identified only by his first name.

One woman told the UN she found it hard to live in a society that rejects people carrying the virus.

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