

MUSEVENI CALLS FOR TOUGHER ACTION ON MEN SPREADING HIV

PHOTO BY HUDSON APUNYO

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President Yoweri Museveni has called on all men to go for voluntary HIV testing in order to prolong their lives and avoid infecting others.

Museveni said he does not like the idea of forcing men to test and if positive, forcing them to take drugs.

The President's remarks were contained in a message read for him by the Vice-President, Edward Kiwanuka Ssekandi during the commemoration of the World AIDS Day held at the National Instructors College Abilonino in Kole district.

"So, please this is not something to discuss. This is something that must be done because there is no point in arresting people and even hanging them when you are a biological weapon - killing other people biologically - that is why they hanged Saddam Hussein," Museveni said.

He said Saddam, a former Iraqi president, was hanged for keeping bacteria such as anthrax, which kill people.

"Now you are here keeping this virus and you think we shall keep begging you to go for tests. Don't you think we should handle you like they handled Saddam Hussein?" he stressed.

Museveni said his story with AIDS started in 1983, while he was in the bush fighting. He said a soldier fell sick and was treated of all diseases, but he failed to recover and died.

Museveni said he tried to talk to Dr Ronald Bata and Dr Kizza Besigye about the soldier's illness, but they had no explanation.

The President said in 1984, he heard about a disease caused by homosexuality, which had no medicine. He said that was not a problem because they did not have homosexuals in the bush and that was not a problem.

He said in 1985, while listening to BBC radio, he heard a female doctor from Italy, living in Zambia who he later learnt was called Dr Ombelly, saying the disease does not only affect homosexuals but others as



Vice-President Ssekandi is received by the US ambassador Malac at the World AIDS Day celebrations

well.

He then called the army officers and warned them about the danger and urged them to avoid their friends in the villages.

The President narrated that he forgot about the scourge as he was busy with other things including taking over Kampala and later in 1986, while attending a Non Aligned Movement conference in Harare, Zimbabwe, Fidel Castro (late Cuban leader) took him aside and told him, there was a big problem in Uganda.

He said some 60 soldiers were sent for a course in Cuba and they were tested, 18 were found to be HIV positive and were deported.

The president added that he became inquisitive and went to the then army headquarters at Republic House, Bulange and interrogated Dr Sam Okware who was in charge of the National AIDS Program.

Okware informed him about how the AIDS virus spreads and that it was not spread by mosquitoes, but through blood or body fluids.

Museveni said Ugandan doctors are well trained, but they are malicious.

"I think they want our people to be completely wiped out," he said

Museveni said AIDS is a simple disease and still believes that the disease is not a big problem if people are serious.

Museveni said when he started to campaign against AIDS, someone told him that it will scare away tourists, but he told them that talking about the issue creates confidence.

He said he started talking loudly about AIDS at all rallies and it bore fruit. He said more ELISA testing machines were brought into the country and another called Western Blot Machine were distributed to hospitals and statistics started coming.

"The figures they were quoting was 30% and this fell to 6% just by sensitisation. At that time, there were no ARVs, there were no other interventions just talking," he said.

Museveni said about four years ago, Michel Sidibe, the executive director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), came to Uganda and he learnt new things from him.

In the speech, Museveni

said he also learnt from Sidibe that those taking ARVs early cannot infect others, but he wondered because he was earlier told that ARV is dangerous.

Museveni said he also talked to the Bishops to stop sharing cups during holy communion. Now he can see the Bishops also wash their hands

He said when he goes for Holy Communion, he does not allow someone to put the cup on his mouth, but pick it himself.

On circumcision, Museveni said there has been confusion.

"When people get circumcised, do they become amoured or what?" he asked.

He said the people of Kasese who get circumcised the prevalence is 8.2% and is worse in Busigu.

Its against this background that the President called on all men to go for testing.

"If you find that you are sick, take those drugs. They will not cure you, but suppress the virus and prolong your life and you don't infect others," the President emphasised

US ambassador to Uganda Deborah R. Malac assured the country of continued support in the fight against HIV.