

What fight against HIV/AIDS calls for

Let me start by reflecting on the words of the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of Uganda. While referring to the problem of HIV and AIDS in the country, President Yoweri Museveni has repeatedly said that the war against HIV/AIDS is bigger than all the military wars we have fought since 1986.

As an officer who has been in command and participated in the military wars at strategic, operational and tactical levels for the last 30 years, I agree with the Commander-in-Chief. It is estimated that Uganda has been losing about 60,000 lives per year since the first case of HIV/AIDS was declared in the early 1980s.

Uganda has not lost, not even a quarter of that number in any war for the last 30 years. We have lost more Generals, senior officers, junior officers and men to HIV/AIDS, than to battle related deaths.

The youth have not been spared either, the UNAIDS reports that, 571 young girls between 14-24 years of age get infected with HIV each week in Uganda.

The New Vision of November 1, reported that, the infection rate/incidences of HIV among adolescents is at 11.1%. How will "emiti emito" (young tress) buttress the forest (the elderly) with such a trend? 33,828 pupils and students were reported positive, 2,816 teachers infected. The prevalence amongst the armed forces



is in two figures, the judiciary is no better, politicians grappling, no body seems to be safe. To control a war of that magnitude, we have to employ a multi-dimensional strategy and make concerted and concentrated effort. A very practical principle employable in wars.

At the beginning of the fight against HIV/AIDS, the principle was applied; we saw the political leadership, led by President Museveni, the artists, led by Philly Lutaaya, the social workers, led by Kaleeba, the clergy, led by Miseiri Kawuma, all coming up to raise awareness about the scourge. No wonder tremendous success against HIV/AIDS was realised. However, indicators are that, the enemy is steadily gaining ground against us, from the prevalence of 6.4 in 2004 to 7.3 in 2011. There is cause for us to re-strategies and have our effort concerted and concentrated

against HIV/AIDS. This is where I have to applaud the Ministry of Health for coming up with the three prolonged approaches of ending HIV (ART, SMC, Pre-PEP) and the structural approach that seeks to address the structural drivers of HIV/AIDS like poverty, broken families etc in our society. The behaviour change approach (ABC), the biomedical approach (ART, SMS, PEP, PRE-PEP). However, we must realise that such effort will have minimal impact if we leave them to Health workers only for implementation. The political leadership, business class, the elite, the informal sector, all government departments must all come on board to re-energise and implement the strategies put in place.

That is why I was more than impressed when I called Aloysius Matovu Joy, to come and join the "Soldiers for life" campaign that aims at re-awakening the awareness of HIV/AIDS in schools to save the youth. His positive response has changed the lives of many young girls and boys in schools the campaign has so far reached.

We all have a role to play to end HIV/AIDS, like the imagery "tofaali" let us all put our tofaali that is within our means, otherwise, *Alluta continua*.

The writer is the 1st Division Commander of the UPDF and chairperson of the "Soldiers for life" campaign.

