

Multisectoral Committee on HIV/AIDS Meeting Ends with A Rekindled Hope of Access to ARV Treatment in the ECOWAS Region.

Despite availability of ARVs, people living with HIV in ECOWAS region still face impediments in accessing treatment and care.

ABIDJAN, COTE D'IVOIRE, July 15, 2014 /EINPresswire.com/ -- ABIDJAN, Cote d'Ivoire, July 15, 2014. A two-day meeting of the ECOWAS Multisectoral Committee on HIV/AIDS control ended here today. Jointly organized by the West African Health Organisation (WAHO) and the UNAIDS Regional Office for West and Central Africa, the meeting assembled around sixty participants comprising representatives of National AIDS Commissions of Member States, ECOWAS Commission, ECOWAS Parliament, logistic officers for pharmaceuticals, and technical and financial partners notably, UNAIDS, WHO, UNDP, UNICEF, USAID, and the civil society, including people living with HIV. .

Welcoming participants to the meeting, WAHO Director General, Dr. Xavier Crespin saluted their collective determination to transforming the 2012-2016 ECOWAS regional HIV/AIDS strategy. Into concrete gains for the ECOWAS populations. Reminding the audience, he said that “ the inauguration

of the ARV buffer stock and protection of human rights are two of those key recommendations which merit close monitoring and evaluation.”

While the availability of ARVs has meant better care of the People living with HIV, yet impediments to access to treatment exist. He premised his view on findings from recent studies which show that HIV infections among most vulnerable populations is around 30 times higher than among the general population. “This documented trend in HIV transmission should shape our interventions if we aim to



Dr. Xavier Crespin (left) chats with participants before the start of the meeting.



Participants Pose for a Photograph with Ivorian Minister of Health, Dr. Raymonde Goudou Coffie

effectively put the epidemic at bay, as recommended by the Abuja+12 recommendations of the African Union Heads of States” he concluded.

Following up to Dr. Crespin's address, the UNAIDS Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Dr. Leo Zekeng expressed satisfaction with WAHO and Committee members for their efforts in implementing the regional strategy to address HIV/AIDS epidemic.

He noted that while HIV response has made significant progress, efforts made so far remain insufficient as 4.5 million adults and children continue to live with HIV/AIDS in the region of which 83 percent are in Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana.

He added that as at end of 2013, only 30 percent of adults have access to treatment and he also reiterated the need for countries to secure the HIV/AIDS response in the post 2015 development agenda. “If we are to make HIV/AIDS epidemic a thing of the past in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2030, the search for innovative domestic financing, strategies to addressing stigma and discrimination, collaboration and partnership will have to be at the core of a sustainable HIV response” he concluded.

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“The regional ARV buffer stock mechanism and protection of human rights are key issues to be closely monitored in our HIV response”

Dr. Xavier Crespin (Director General, WAHO)

Declaring the meeting open, Cote d'Ivoire's Minister of Health and HIV/AIDS Programme, Dr. Raymonde Goudou Coffie thanked participants for having chosen Cote d'Ivoire for hosting the meeting. She retraced the origin of the ARV buffer stock mechanism to the 14th ordinary meeting of ECOWAS Assembly of Ministers of Health where the decision was made to have Cote d'Ivoire host the stock at its New Public Health Pharmacy.

She also reaffirmed Cote d'Ivoire's willingness to fulfil its commitment in terms of agreement concerning the efficient management of the Regional ARV Buffer Stock to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of zero HIV infection. She said, “Like other countries within the ECOWAS region, Cote d'Ivoire remains determined to pursue the goal of zero HIV infection through the provision of universal access to treatment and care by those who need them. “

Dr. Coffie added that the country has strengthened the legal framework through the law on HIV/AIDS with respect to the rights of people living with HIV. Earlier during the first day of the meeting, participants visited the depot of the New Public Health Pharmacy where the \$2 million worth of regional ARV buffer stock is hosted.

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