



CENTER FOR STRATEGIC
AND POLICY STUDIES

Living the future today

CSPS

MONITOR



DECEMBER 2024

KENYA

KENYA POLICE FIRED TEAR GAS AT PROTEST AGAINST ALLEGED GOVERNMENT ABDUCTIONS

DOZENS OF KENYANS HAVE BEEN ABDUCTED IN RECENT MONTHS, ACCORDING TO RIGHTS GROUPS, WHO BLAME POLICE AND INTELLIGENCE SERVICES.

30TH DECEMBER 2024

Police in Kenya's capital Nairobi have fired tear gas to disperse protesters demonstrating against what they say is a wave of unexplained abductions of government critics.

Dozens of Kenyans have been abducted in recent months, according to human rights groups, who blame the extrajudicial arrests on Kenya's police and intelligence services.

Kenyan authorities have said the government does not condone or engage in extrajudicial killings or abductions.

Some groups of young protesters marched in downtown Nairobi on Monday, while small groups of others staged sit-ins as clouds of tear gas hung in the air. They chanted slogans against the government, with some holding placards denouncing illegal detentions as police on horseback patrolled nearby.

Among the protesters was opposition lawmaker Okiya Omtatah, who was taking part in a sit-in, with demonstrators using thick chains to hold them together as riot police tried to prise them apart.

'LIVING IN FEAR'

On Monday, Omtatah filed a case at the High Court in Nairobi seeking to compel the government to free seven youths, accusing the police of abducting them.

Kenyan newspaper Daily Nation reported that Omtatah and 10 other protesters had been detained during the protests.

The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights last week raised concern about a growing number of alleged kidnappings of government critics, saying that the total number of such cases stands at 82 since antigovernment protests started in June.

Initially aimed at overturning proposed tax hikes, the demonstrations eventually evolved into a movement that cut across Kenya's traditional ethnic divisions, becoming the biggest threat to President William Ruto's government.

Ruto on Saturday said the government would stop the abductions so that young people live in peace.

"If they have committed a crime, let them be prosecuted and presented in court to defend themselves," he said.

Young protesters said they were in solidarity with those abducted while going about their daily lives. "We are existing at a time where we have to live in fear," a protester, Orpah Thabiti, said.

Four social media users went missing after they shared AI-generated images of Ruto that were deemed offensive by government supporters.

The rights commission had warned that Kenya was heading back to the "dark days" of the disappearance of government critics. The abduction and torture of the opposition were common under the administration of the late President Daniel Moi.

Wanjiru Gikonyo, researcher on good governance and accountability, said the

protests in Kenya have been "organic, from the ground, leaderless, and digitally organised".

"What we are seeing in the larger context is actually a political transition," Gikonyo told Al Jazeera.

"These young people, as much as they don't have one identified leader, actually have the heart and minds of Kenyans. This is showing that Kenyans are done with having a constitution on paper that is not expressed in reality," she added.

The current political leadership headed by Ruto, she said, has "failed to deliver the promise of democratic transition", something that is unlikely to change.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/12/30/kenya-police-fire-tear-gas-at-protest-against-alleged-government-abductions>

KENYA'S DEVASTATING DROUGHT IS THE WORST IN 40 YEARS

THE EXTREME CONDITIONS ARE LEAVING MILLIONS WITHOUT FOOD OR CLEAN WATER.

15TH DECEMBER 2024

Drought in Kenya has reached dramatic levels, with millions of people affected by the lack of water and food. This phenomenon, which until a few years ago followed predictable seasonal cycles, has become increasingly frequent and intense.

Recent climate crises have worsened the living conditions of the inhabitants of arid and semi-arid regions, whose survival depends heavily on agriculture and livestock.

According to the United Nations, in this historical phase the Kenyan people are experiencing the worst water crisis in the last 40 years and millions of people do not have stable access to safe water sources. Rivers, lakes and aquifers are slowly drying up. In the

northern areas of Kenya, women and children are forced to travel ever greater distances every day to collect unclean water from the subsoil, which can cause infections and diseases.

In the 2024 UN Climate Change Conference (COP29) held in Baku, Azerbaijan this year, Kenya reiterated the need for more financial support from developed countries to find adaptation solutions and help the country overcome such a difficult time.

Among the main outcomes of the conference was the "Baku Climate Unity Pact", which includes new collective financial targets to support vulnerable countries and a roadmap for global climate adaptation. This agreement aims to strengthen the resilience capacity of all countries that, like Kenya, are the most affected by climate change – some of which are the least industrialized, and consequently, those with the least greenhouse gas emissions.

The results of COP29 highlight a strong global commitment to support the most vulnerable nations, but the main challenge remains to transform promises into concrete actions to mitigate the effects of drought and climate change on Kenya and other countries experiencing similar situations.

The bank of the dried-up Kawalase River in Turkana County, northwest Kenya on October 16, 2024. Kenya's rivers are drying up rapidly, with low rainfall and global warming among the main causes of this phenomenon. [Alessio Paduano/Al Jazeera]

A man (left) drinks water from a canister while another man (right) fills water cans using a mechanical extractor at the dried-up Napasinyang riverbed in Kalokol, in Turkana County, on October 15, 2024. The severe drought has prompted some people into business selling water - in this case for five Kenyan shillings (\$0.04). However, the water

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/12/15/photos-kenyas-devastating-drought-is-the-worst-in-40-years>

is sourced from the underground, which is not clean. [Alessio Paduano/Al Jazeera]

Women fetch water from the dried-up Kalotumum River in Kerio, in Turkana County, on October 17, 2024. Because of the severe drought, many people are forced to drink water fetched from underground, which is not clean and often causes infections or diseases. According a 2023 UN Water Development Report, groundwater levels are falling, forcing some communities to drill wells twice as deep as a decade ago. [Alessio Paduano/Al Jazeera]

Women and children wait their turn outside the Kalokol Gok Health Centre, in Turkana County, on October 16, 2024. The centre provides medicine and food supplements, as well as monitors patients' health, which is put at risk by the severe drought affecting the country. [Alessio Paduano/Al Jazeera]

Doctors measure the heart rate of four-month-old Quinta while her mother Nancy, 32, holds her inside the examination room of the Kangatosa Health Centre on October 19, 2024. [Alessio Paduano/Al Jazeera]

A child likely suffering from malaria sleeps on a bench, while a man waits his turn to see a doctor at the Kalokol Gok Health Centre on October 16, 2024. Children often fetch water with their mothers in areas where stagnant pools of water form and mosquitoes that carry the malaria parasite proliferate. Kenya's intense drought provides favourable conditions for mosquitoes. [Alessio Paduano/Al Jazeera]

Children play with mud on the bank of the dried Kawalasee River in Lodwar, northwest Kenya on October 19, 2024. Kenya's rivers are drying up rapidly, with low rainfall and global warming being among the main causes of this phenomenon. [Alessio Paduano/Al Jazeera]

UGANDA

UGANDA LEADER BACKS MILITARY TRIALS AS RIVAL IN JAIL FOR CHRISTMAS

12TH DECEMBER 2024

Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni, 80, has defended the use of military courts to try civilians - following an outcry over the arrest and trial of opposition leader Kizza Besigye.

His 68-year-old rival has been charged in a military court with possession of pistols and attempting to purchase weapons abroad - accusations he denies.

Besigye, who was abducted while visiting Kenya last month and forcibly taken to Uganda, found out on Tuesday that he would be spending Christmas in custody as his trial has been delayed until January.

Museveni said any crime involving a gun was dealt with in a military court to ensure the country's stability as civilian courts took too long to deal with cases.

Hundreds of civilians have been tried in Uganda's military courts, even though the Constitutional Court has ruled against the practice.

- How Besigye disappeared in Kenya and ended up in military court
- How an ex-rebel has stayed in power for more than 30 years

"I have seen the arguments in the papers by some lawyers regarding the correctness of some civilians being tried in the Court Martial," [President Museveni said in a long post on X](#).

He said his National Resistance Movement (NRM) party had enacted a law through

parliament in 2005 to allow the use of military courts because of the "rampant activities of criminals and terrorists that were using guns to kill people indiscriminately".

"The civilian courts were clogged with the many court cases of the whole country: murders, rape, assaults, robbery, land matters, divorce matters etc, etc. They could, therefore, not handle these gun-wielding criminals quickly. Yet, for stabilization you need speed," he said.

Besigye has objected to being tried by a court martial, saying that if there were any charges against him, he should be tried in a civilian court.

A fierce rival of Museveni, he has contested and lost four presidential elections against Uganda's leader, who has been in power since 1986.

He has been less active in politics in the last couple of years, and did not contest the 2021 election.

The veteran politician - who was once Museveni's personal doctor - has been arrested dozens of times in Uganda but never convicted.

Earlier this year he announced he was returning to the political fray to help sort out

his party, which has split into two factions.

Activists and rights groups have rallied behind him, condemning his treatment as unfair.

"Civilians tried in Uganda's military courts do not receive the same due process guarantees as those in civilian courts," UN human rights chief Volker Türk said.

There are reports that his arrest had been planned for months.

Human Rights Watch has urged the Ugandan

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwydqxzdj5wo>

government to end the "weaponization of military detention" and the trial of political opposition leaders and their supporters.

But Museveni said the East African nation was justified in using court martials.

He ended his statement with this praise for them: "You have made your own contribution to our peace."

UGANDA SENTENCES LRA COMMANDER THOMAS KWOYELO TO 40 YEARS FOR WAR CRIMES

LANDMARK TRIAL IS FIRST TIME A LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY MEMBER HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO JUSTICE IN THE EAST AFRICAN COUNTRY.

25TH OCTOBER 2024

A court in Uganda has sentenced Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) commander Thomas Kwoyelo to 40 years in prison after a landmark war crimes trial over his role in the group's two-decade reign of violence.

The sentence was announced on Friday by Michael Elubu, the lead judge in the case, at a court in the northern city of Gulu.

Justice Duncan Gasagwa, one of four judges on the case, said "the convict played a prominent role in the planning, strategy and actual execution of the offences of extreme gravity".

LANDMARK TRIAL

The trial marked the first time a member of the LRA had been tried by Uganda's judiciary. It was also the first atrocity case to be tried under a special division of the high court that focuses on international crimes.

He added that "the victims have been left with lasting physical and mental pain and suffering".

Kwoyelo was found guilty in August of 44 offences, including murder and rape, and not guilty of three counts of murder. Thirty-one alternate offences were dismissed.

Founded in the late 1980s with the aim of overthrowing the government of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, the LRA brutalised Ugandans under the leadership of Joseph Kony for nearly 20 years as it battled the military from bases in northern Uganda.

The fighters were notorious for horrific acts of cruelty, including hacking off victims' limbs and lips and using crude instruments to bludgeon people to death.

Kwoyelo, believed to be in his fifties, was a low-level commander of the LRA, tasked with caring for the group's injured members, according to his testimony.

He says he was forced to join the LRA in 1987, after the group's members abducted him on his way to school at age 12, at the peak of the rebel conflict. He went on to become a senior commander, using the alias Latoni, and overseeing the treatment of wounded fighters.

In 2009, Kwoyelo was captured in neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) during a raid by regional forces. The LRA rebels had been forced out of northern Uganda into DRC and other neighbouring countries a few years earlier because of the Ugandan military's offensives on the group.

Kwoyelo was brought back to Uganda, having suffered a bullet wound to his stomach.

He spent the next 14 years in prison as the prosecution put the case against him together.

Due to his long pre-trial detention by the Ugandan authorities, some had advocated for Kwoyelo's release.

"Our children are innocent because they were

forcefully conscripted into combat," Okello Okuna, a spokesperson for Ker Kwaro Acholi, a traditional kingdom in Gulu, told Al Jazeera in February.

Rights groups, such as Avocats Sans Frontieres, pointed out that holding Kwoyelo in detention for more than a decade muddled the case for the prosecution.

But others, including victims, said Kwoyelo was involved in killings and torture, and should therefore face justice.

"He was a rude person and a fighter," a victim who was born in LRA captivity and identified only as Jaqueline told Al Jazeera in February, adding that Kwoyelo killed her father for failing to follow orders.

Defence lead lawyer Caleb Akala had consistently pleaded Kwoyelo's innocence, arguing that he was himself a child victim of the LRA.

However, witnesses maintained Kwoyelo led several LRA incursions and was involved in killings.

Judge Gasagwa said Kwoyelo avoided the death sentence because he was recruited by the LRA at a young age, was not one of the top-ranking commanders, and has expressed remorse and a willingness to reconcile with the victims.

Thousands of children were abducted by the group and used as sex slaves or child soldiers.

The LRA is designated as a terror group by the United Nations, the United States, the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Source: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/25/uganda-sentences-lra-commander-thomas-kwoyelo-to-40-years-for-war-crimes>

TANZANIA

TANZANIA OPPOSITION YOUTH LEADER DUMPED AT BEACH AFTER ABDUCTION

2ND DECEMBER 2024

Tanzanian opposition youth leader Abdul Nondo has been found following being dumped at a beach, less than a day after he was reportedly kidnapped in the main city of Dar es Salaam.

His party, ACT Wazalendo, says Nondo was severely beaten and injured and has been taken to hospital.

The party's deputy chairperson, Isihaka Mchinjita, said the politician had been blindfolded and repeatedly assaulted while being threatened with death.

The police have issued a statement confirming the incident at Coco Beach late on Sunday night, saying they are investigating the matter.

They said he had been abandoned at the beach by his abductors and had sought help from a motorcycle taxi rider, who then took him to the party offices.

"From there, party leaders rushed him to the hospital for treatment. We are investigating and we will take legal action," police spokesman David Misime said on Monday morning.

After visiting him in hospital, Mchinjita said in an earlier update at 02:00 local time (23:00 GMT), that Nondo had been beaten "for a long time" before being dumped at the beach where the abductors "removed his blindfold and handcuffs".

"Nondo said his abductors threatened him,

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cr56n49md6po>

warning him that if they capture him again, they would not spare his life," he added

The motive behind his abduction is not clear.

On Sunday, ACT Wazalendo said Nondo was snatched minutes after he had arrived from the western region of the country where he had been campaigning for the party's candidates in last week's local elections.

He had been taken from a bus station in Dar es Salaam in the early hours of Sunday by two individuals travelling in a white four-wheel-drive vehicle.

The police now say investigations are under way to identify the suspects and determine their motive.

This incident follows the [kidnapping and killing of a senior leader](#) from the main opposition party in September.

In that case, Chadema's Ali Mohamed Kibao was taken from a bus, beaten and then doused with acid. President Samia Suluhu Hassan denounced the incident and called for an investigation into the murder.

ETHIOPIA

DOZENS DIE IN ETHIOPIA AFTER LORRY WITH WEDDING GUESTS FALLS INTO RIVER

30TH DECEMBER 2024

At least 71 people have died in southern Ethiopia after a lorry plunged into a river, officials say.

The vehicle, which was travelling through Sidama state on Sunday, fell into the river after it missed a bridge, a local official told the Reuters news agency.

Wosenyeleh Simion said many of the passengers had been guests at a wedding party.

Traffic police in the region reported the lorry was overloaded, which was likely to have caused the incident, Mr Simion said. Further investigations are under way.

Of the people known to have died, 68 were men and 3 were women, the Sidama Police Commission Traffic Prevention and Control

Source <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5y471z0g82o>

Directorate said.

Blurred images shared on Facebook by the state health bureau show a group of people attempting to pull a damaged vehicle from a body of water in the district of Bona.

Other images shared by the bureau appear to show bodies, some covered in blue tarpaulin, lying on the ground.

Thousands of people are killed every year in road accidents in Ethiopia, with over-speeding and disregard for traffic laws often blamed.

ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA AGREE TO END BITTER SOMALILAND PORT FEUD

12TH DECEMBER 2024

Ethiopia and Somalia have agreed to end their bitter dispute over Addis Ababa's plans to build a port in the breakaway republic of Somaliland following talks in Turkey.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan welcomed the "historic agreement", which he said would eventually ensure landlocked Ethiopia's access to the sea.

At the press conference he held hands with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and

Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who both agreed to respect one another's "sovereignty".

The two neighbours have been at loggerheads since January when Ethiopia signed a maritime deal with Somaliland - which

Somalia considers as part of its territory.

It prompted fears of a wider regional conflict as Egypt has been backing Somalia - largely due to its anger with Ethiopia for building a dam on the River Nile.

Turkey has in recent years become an important geopolitical player in the Horn of Africa as it has close economic ties with Addis Ababa and security deals with Mogadishu.

- Ethiopia-Somaliland deal: Can the Horn of Africa rift be healed?
- Ethiopia warns against invasion amid regional tensions
- Why Ethiopia is so alarmed by an Egypt-Somalia alliance

Erdogan said the agreement - announced on Wednesday night in the Turkish capital, Ankara - was "the first step towards a new beginning".

"I congratulate both my brothers for reaching to this historic reconciliation with devotion and thank them for their constructive attitude," he said.

President Mohamud said his country was "ready to work with the Ethiopian leadership and the Ethiopian people".

While Prime Minister Abiy insisted Ethiopia's efforts to secure and reliable access to the sea did not threaten Somalia and the two had "addressed the misunderstandings that have occurred over the past year".

The feud began on New Year's Day, when Abiy signed a controversial deal with Somaliland to

Source <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvgr7v1evvgo>

lease a 20km (12-mile) section of its coastline for 50 years to set up a naval base.

In exchange, Ethiopia - the world's most-populous landlocked nation - was to reportedly recognise Somaliland as an independent country, although Addis Ababa never explicitly confirmed this.

Somaliland, which broke away from Somalia more than 30 years ago, has long been pushing for recognition - but Mogadishu described the move as an act of "aggression".

According to the Ankara joint declaration, the two Horn of Africa neighbours are to reconvene in February to hold "technical talks".

In the interim they will strive to reach "mutually beneficial commercial arrangements" to ensure Ethiopia gains access to the sea "under Somalia's sovereignty".

It is not clear if Ethiopia has discarded the deal it signed with Somaliland - something demanded by Somalia at earlier mediation efforts.

Last month, Somaliland elected a new president - former opposition leader Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi - who promised to «review» the maritime deal.

During his inauguration speech on Thursday morning he made no mention of it.

Somaliland is located in a strategic part of the world, and is seen as a gateway to the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

RWANDA

WHO REPRESENTATIVE’S REMARKS AT CELEBRATION OF END OF MARBURG VIRUS DISEASE OUTBREAK IN RWANDA

20TH DECEMBER 2024

I would like to congratulate the Government of Rwanda, through the Ministry of Health, especially you Minister of Health, for the exceptional leadership in effectively containing the very first Marburg virus disease outbreak in Rwanda. Your decisive actions, unwavering commitment, and rapid response were instrumental in preventing widespread negative impact and safeguarding lives. This remarkable achievement underscores Rwanda’s strong health system, resilience and dedication to protecting public health.

Today, we gather to mark this milestone – the official declaration of the end of the Marburg outbreak in Rwanda. It is a testament to the spirit of the Rwandan people, the strength of the country leadership, the bravery of its healthcare workers, and the transformative power of collaboration and partnership.

During the outbreak, WHO deployed approximately 20 of the world’s leading experts on filoviruses (Ebola and Marburg) on a rotating basis from regional and headquarters levels, alongside the entire country office team. Additionally, WHO mobilized 39 health experts from the AVoHC-SURGE cohort hailing from Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone. This marked the largest deployment of first responders ever. This effort was in response to a request from you Honourable Minister to address gaps in intensive care units and emergency care, as the outbreak severely impacted health workers. This deployment demonstrated the solidarity among member states in the region. I would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) for funding the AVoHC-SURGE

initiative, an investment that is bearing results.

We have been honoured as WHO to have been able to work very closely with a wide range of partners to support government in this response. As partners, we were able to coordinate ourselves, under government leadership, and effectively and efficiently respond to national needs. Together, we elevated our partnership, strengthening our shared commitment to health security in supporting the government of Rwanda. I would like to thank the US Government, the European Union and the British Government for funding support to WHO in the response. I would also like to thank fellow UN agencies, Africa CDC, together with the Governments of Liberia, Uganda, and Sierra Leone, the Global Outbreak Alert and Response network (GOARN) collaborators, bilateral partners, multilateral partners, international NGOs, and all other partners and individuals who contributed to this effort.

On behalf of WHO and all development partners, we are proud to have worked hand-in-hand with the Government of Rwanda and contributed to the achievement

of this remarkable milestone in the Marburg outbreak response. Through decisive case management and a comprehensive strategy, loss of life was significantly reduced, and community transmission was stopped. With case fatality rates (CFR) for Marburg outbreaks the world over known to range from 24% to 88%, Rwanda’s 22.7% CFR has set a new regional benchmark for managing filovirus outbreaks.

The outbreak underscored the need to strengthen International Health Regulations (IHR) capacities, which are fundamental to building robust health systems capable of responding effectively to future public health threats. WHO remains committed to continue partnering with the Government of Rwanda to enhance these capacities, ensuring the country is well-prepared for any emerging challenges. Furthermore, the outbreak highlighted the importance of the One Health approach, which recognizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. By integrating efforts across sectors, we can more efficiently prevent, detect, and respond to health threats. One Health is not just a strategic framework; it is an essential approach in a world where

Source <https://www.afro.who.int/countries/rwanda/news/who-representatives-remarks-celebration-end-marburg-virus-disease-outbreak-rwanda>

MARBURG OUTBREAK IN RWANDA DECLARED OVER

20TH DECEMBER 2024

Kigali, Rwanda – The outbreak of Marburg Virus Disease was declared over today by the Government of Rwanda with no new cases reported over the last 42 days after the last patient tested negative for the virus twice, as per the usual protocol for ending these types of outbreaks.

The outbreak, confirmed on 27 September 2024, was the first Marburg Virus Disease outbreak Rwanda has experienced. A total of 66 confirmed cases and 15 deaths were recorded. Almost 80% of the cases were among

health threats know no boundaries.

We look forward to the after-action review that is being planned by Ministry of Health with WHO and other partners that will document the response and the lessons learnt, including the importance of preparedness and early detection.

To the health workers, community leaders, and all those who contributed, we express our deepest gratitude. Your dedication, resilience, and courage were the backbone of this response. To colleagues who made the ultimate sacrifice, your bravery and selflessness will never be forgotten. Your legacy lives on in the lives saved and in the stronger health system we are building together. You are the true heroes, and your spirit will continue to guide us forward.

As we close this chapter and look ahead, may the holiday season bring you joy, peace, and the rest needed to recharge. As we celebrate, let us enter the new year with renewed hope, strength, and a unified resolve to building a healthier, safer world for all.

health workers who were infected while providing clinical care to their colleagues and other patients.

To halt the spread of the virus and save lives,

Rwandan health authorities, with support from World Health Organization (WHO) and partners, mounted a comprehensive response, with a large range of measures from disease surveillance, testing, infection prevention and control, contact tracing, to clinical care and public awareness. These actions helped to curb the spread of the outbreak, with cases halved between weeks two and three after detection and declining by around 90% thereafter.

“The robust response by Rwanda shows how committed leadership, concerted efforts by partners and a strong health system are crucial in addressing public health emergencies, saving and protecting lives as well as safeguarding the health of individuals and communities,” said Dr Brian Chirombo, WHO Representative in Rwanda.

The deployment of WHO experts, a team of national first responders from other countries in the region and the strong mobilization of national efforts were instrumental in enhancing the outbreak response. The last confirmed case received their second negative

PCR results on 7 November, kicking off the 42-day countdown to declaring the end of the outbreak, as per WHO recommendation.

WHO continues to work closely with the national authorities to maintain critical measures to ensure swift detection and response in case of any flare-up or new spillover of the virus. WHO will continue to support the Ministry of Health to implement and sustain a holistic care programme for people who recovered from Marburg Virus Disease to help them overcome any after-effects they may experience.

The virus which causes Marburg, is in the same family as the virus that causes Ebola Virus Disease. It is highly virulent with a fatality rate ranging from 24% to 88%. In this outbreak, the fatality rate was on the lower end, at around 23%. Marburg virus is transmitted to people from fruit bats and spreads among humans through direct contact with the bodily fluids of infected people, surfaces and materials.

MULTI-MONTH HIV TREATMENT DISPENSING IMPROVES CARE IN RWANDA

1ST DECEMBER 2024

Kigali – Esther Uwabyeyi’s journey with HIV began at a young age. “Since the age of three, I’ve been on HIV treatment,” she says. Born in 2002, Uwabyeyi was infected during her mother’s pregnancy, a time when access to HIV treatment for women living with HIV was only just starting to improve. Now 22 years old and living in Rwanda’s Rwamagana district in the Eastern Province, she has benefitted greatly from the advancements in country’s HIV treatment programme over the years.

In 2015, Rwanda updated its HIV treatment guidelines, aligning with World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation that people living with HIV should begin antiretroviral treatment immediately after diagnosis, regardless of clinical symptoms or CD4 cell count. Despite this progress, people

living with HIV still needed to visit the clinic monthly for monitoring, treatment refills and psychosocial support.

For Uwabyeyi, who was an adolescent at the time, visiting the clinic once a month was challenging. “During my high school years in

boarding school, I faced stigma surrounding my HIV status. I was reluctant to disclose my status, fearing discrimination. To manage the monthly clinic visits, I had to come up with excuses for my absences each month,” she recalls.

In 2016, Rwanda adopted the WHO-recommended differentiated service delivery model, which simplifies and adapts HIV prevention, treatment and care services to better serve the individual needs of health clients and reduce the burden on the health system. This included multi-month dispensing of HIV treatment, allowing people to receive several months of medication at once.

People living with HIV who had been on treatment for at least 18 months and demonstrated good adherence and achieved successful viral suppression could refill their HIV treatment every three months. In 2020, this was extended to six months under the same conditions.

Dr Ribakare Muhayimpundu, the HIV/STIs/tuberculosis/hepatitis programme officer at WHO Rwanda highlights the significant benefits of the multi-month dispensing model for the HIV response. “It is one of the differentiated strategies that improved recipients’ adherence while alleviating the burden on the health care system from monthly visits,” she explains. WHO facilitated expert workshops to assess the feasibility of global guidelines within the country, helped define implementation needs, adapt tools and train health workers.

This innovation was transformative for Uwabyeyi. “In 2019, after successful suppression of my viral load and demonstrating adherence to treatment, I was enrolled in a three-month antiretroviral refill programme while still attending boarding school,” she

recalls. “Throughout my final year of high school, my appointments were scheduled during end-of-term holidays, allowing me to complete my education without interruption.” Upon graduating in 2022, her adherence record led to an upgrade in her refill schedule to six months.

In 2017, the Ministry of Health, through the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC), introduced a community-based peer education model alongside multi-month dispensing to maintain service quality. WHO worked with the country to design and adapt this model to the local context, develop criteria for peer educator selection, create a training manual and trained around 5,000 peer educators, working closely with networks of people living with HIV.

Havugimana Faustin, one of the trained peer educators from 2017, began HIV treatment in 2006, two years after his diagnosis. He was upgraded to three-month HIV treatment refills and elected as a peer educator. “I make monthly visits to check on people’s adherence and address any emerging issues, ensuring timely referral to healthcare facilities, when necessary,” says Faustin. “I’m pleased to report that most of my peers exhibit good adherence and appreciate the benefits of the refill programme.”

These innovations, initiated nearly a decade ago, have significantly enhanced the quality of care within Rwanda’s health system and the quality of life of people living with HIV. They have also positioned Rwanda as a global leader in the HIV response. Rwanda is one of only five countries worldwide, along with Botswana, Eswatini, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe, to have achieved the UNAIDS 95-95-95 treatment targets ahead of schedule. By 2025, these targets aim for 95% of people living with HIV to know their HIV status; 95% of people diagnosed with HIV to be on

HIV treatment, and 95% of those on treatment are achieve viral suppression. Rwanda has surpassed these targets at 95%, 97.5% and 98% respectively.

"Multi-month drug dispensing has saved our patients time and money," says Dr Simeon Tuyishime, the Director of HIV Care and Treatment at RBC. "Instead of monthly visits,

many of our patients now visit health facilities every three to six months. This change saves them money on transportation and gives them more time to care for their families. This convenience has also enhanced treatment adherence and viral suppression."

Source <https://www.afro.who.int/countries/rwanda/news/multi-month-hiv-treatment-dispensing-improves-care-rwanda>

CSPS
MONITOR



**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC
AND POLICY STUDIES**
Living the future today

© 2024 CSPS. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from CSPS, except in the case of brief quotations in news articles, critical articles, or reviews. Please direct inquiries to: CSPS

P.O. BOX 619, Hai Jebrona, Adjacent to Martyrs School,
Opposite Simba Playground, Juba, South Sudan.
Tel: +211 (0) 920 310 415 | +211 (0) 915 652 847
<https://cspss.org.ss>