

# S. Africa slow to react to rise in AIDS infections

By Lynne Duke  
The Washington Post

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- As the startling spread of AIDS in Africa continues to thwart the continent's development, South Africa -- the region's economic powerhouse -- is showing such rapid AIDS growth that overall life expectancy here could fall by nearly a third over the next decade.

About 14 percent of South Africa's 32 million people are infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, and 1,500 more are diagnosed with the virus each day, according to government statistics. If the virus' spread continues as it is now, South Africa's overall life expectancy could fall from around 68 years to 48 years in the first

decade of the new millennium, according to government and U.N. statistics.

Long sheltered from AIDS because of its international isolation under apartheid, South Africa's post-apartheid AIDS epidemic now is helping to fuel southern Africa's dubious distinction as the global AIDS epicenter.

Most of the countries hit hardest by the global AIDS epidemic are in southern Africa, notably Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Swaziland. Between 20 percent and 26 percent of adults in those countries are infected with HIV or have AIDS.

"We now know that despite these already very high levels of HIV infection, the worst is still to come in southern Africa," said Peter Piot, executive director of the Joint United

Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, which marked World AIDS Day today in South Africa. "The region is facing a human disaster on a scale it has never seen before."

South Africa is rapidly catching up with its neighbors: Of the 1.4 million people between the ages of 15 and 49 who were infected with HIV this year in nine southern African countries, slightly more than 50 percent were in South Africa.

Health experts attribute the rapid increase of AIDS in South Africa to a variety of factors, ranging from grassroots disdain for condoms, to slow-off-the-mark public awareness campaigns, to migrant labor patterns both inside South Africa and between it and neighboring countries.

For decades, rural South African men have migrated to cities for work,

leaving families behind and often taking up new partners -- whether romantic or commercial. In addition, some rural women left behind take up secret partners as well. On top of these trends, South Africa's post-apartheid openness has made for a degree of cross-border traffic unheard of when international sanctions against the old white-minority regime ensured the country's isolation.

"There's an interaction between all these countries because of migration patterns," Piot said.

As sudden as South Africa's problem is, the plague of AIDS in Africa is an old one. Since the first AIDS deaths were recorded in the 1980s, 83 percent of the world's AIDS deaths have been in sub-Saharan Africa, and 95 percent of the world's AIDS orphans are African. This year, 70 per-

cent of the world's newly infected people are in this sub-Saharan region.

As devastating as the epidemic's immediate effect has been in human terms, its economic repercussions promise a long-term erosion or thwarting of development. Economists say that growth rates are hampered in hard-hit countries because of the public and private expenditures necessitated by the epidemic. The United Nations estimates that by 2005, South African businesses will be paying out AIDS-related employee benefits equivalent to 19 percent of salaries, up from 7 percent in 1995.

"Whether measured against the yardstick of falling life expectancy, deteriorating household income, overburdened health systems, child deaths, orphanhood or bottom-line losses to business, AIDS has never posed a big-

ger threat to development," the U.N. AIDS program says.

Alarmed South African officials, fearing their efforts to improve the lot of this long-oppressed society are in peril, are speaking about AIDS and sex and morality in more blunt terms than ever before. Today President Nelson Mandela even called on sexual partners to use condoms.

"Although AIDS has been part of our lives for 15 years or more, we have kept silent about its true presence in our midst. We have too often spoken of it as someone else's problem," Mandela said as his cabinet ministers were fanning out around the country to deliver similar messages.

Piot hailed South Africa's aggressive new public awareness campaign but said that "yes, it could have come earlier, that's for sure."

## 6 weeks in an Arctic hut

By Kevin Sullivan and Mary Jordan  
The Washington Post

TOKYO -- They survived on cold porridge and rice and endured nightly visits from polar bears who clawed on the door of their tiny hut. For a month and a half, three filmmakers stranded by blizzards on a desolate Russian island above the Arctic Circle mostly sat in the darkness to conserve fuel and communicated by e-mail with would-be rescuers on three continents.

For six weeks blizzards raged across the mountains of Wrangel Island in the East Siberian Sea. The two-room research hut was in darkness 21 hours a day, with only three hours of weak twilight. The men had three books: one in each of their native languages. By last weekend, their food was nearly exhausted, with no way to get supplies in or them out. Then Tuesday, the weather cleared just enough for a helicopter to make the trip across the frozen sea, pick the men up and carry them to safety on the Siberian mainland. Tuesday night, they were resting in a hotel in the frontier settlement of Pevek, itself an ice-locked and desolate Arctic outpost but a welcome sight for three tired men.

"Everybody is healthy and in good humor," Nikita Ovsyannikov, a Russian wildlife expert on the team, told Reuters news agency by telephone from Pevek. "We were in a warm cabin with enough fuel, quite safe and everybody was healthy. The only real problem was that we were running out of food."

"Basically our health is good but we are thinner," Tatsuhiro Kobayashi, a Japanese television producer, told the wire service. "I lost eight kilos (18 pounds). ... It was very cold ... and we had packed just a few clothes for autumn."

Michael Stedman, managing director of Natural History New Zealand Ltd., a film company co-producing the documentary on Arctic wildlife that brought the men to the island in mid-September, said the three "were in pretty good condition given what they've just gone through -- the meager food rations, the extreme cold and the psychological tensions. ... It's the end of a horrendous journey."

One of the ironies of the rescue was the key role played by technology -- and its limitations. The world is now so wired to the Internet that even three people stranded in one of the most remote and difficult-to-reach places on the globe were able to send e-mail via a battery-powered satellite telephone. But while they could have ordered a thousand pizzas with a click of their mouse, the Internet could not bring them the food they needed to survive.

"It would have been much more horrific without that satellite phone, in the polar darkness with polar bears scratching at the door at night -- it wasn't fun," said John Hyde, a producer at the New Zealand company.

There were conflicting reports about who rescued the men. The Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations claimed credit, as did a private rescue service hired by the New Zealand film company.

The confusion underscored the delicate nature of the negotiations for the rescue of a Japanese producer, an Australian cameraman and a Russian guide. Officials close to the talks said tremendous pressure was building to get them out Tuesday. Officials from several governments involved reportedly favored asking U.S. Coast Guard crews and aircraft from Alaska

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Tatsuhiro Kobayashi, a Japanese television producer

to perform the rescue. The thinking was that Coast Guard equipment and technology were superior to what the Russians had on hand in that remote backwater of Siberia.

The Russians reportedly were uncomfortable with having Americans rescue a Russian in Russia and wanted to get the men out quickly to keep the issue from reaching a head. Tuesday night, the Japanese television network NHK, the other co-producer of the film, was reporting that Russia arranged the rescue. But officials from the New Zealand film company and AEA International SOS, the private rescue company, said AEA operated the helicopter.

Kobayashi, Ovsyannikov and cameraman Rory McGuinness had been scheduled to stay only a month but weather severe even by Arctic standards prevented them from moving. They spent their final days huddled together in their hut at Point Blossom, a spit of iced-over tundra on the southwestern tip of the island.

Wrangel Island is one of the world's richest homes of walrus, polar bears and snow geese, but also one of the harshest environments on Earth. About 24 people live on the island year round, in the tiny village of Ushakovskoye, about 35 miles from the hut. In the last five weeks, villagers had tried to reach the men by snowmobile, but were forced back by heavy weather.

Ovsyannikov told Reuters that the men continued working on the documentary until their film ran out in mid-November.

He said the men developed a daily routine inside their cabin. "I was cooking for the guys and they were washing dishes and supplying water from snow," said Ovsyannikov, who had been on the island since July. He said the remaining supplies were rice, some grain, beans, sugar and tea. Meat ran out a week before.

## New evidence suggests Earhart died on Nikumaroro Island

By Thomas H. Maugh II  
Los Angeles Times

American researchers have discovered new evidence, long buried in British military archives, suggesting that famed U.S. aviator Amelia Earhart died on Nikumaroro Island in the Polynesian Republic of Kiribati.

British soldiers found bones on the island, then called Gardner Island, in 1940, and suspecting they might be those of Earhart, sent them to British headquarters in Tarawa.

A physician there concluded that they were the bones of a male. A report was forwarded to England, but Americans were never notified of the discovery.

A member of The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery (TIGHAR), a nonprofit group that has been searching for evidence of Earhart's demise for 10 years, stumbled across some of the records in Tarawa. This prompted TIGHAR director Richard Gillespie to locate the original archival material in England.

Precise dimensions of the bones taken from the paperwork, discovered only two weeks ago, indicate that the skeleton represented the remains of a white female of northern European extraction, about 5 feet 7 inches tall, according to two forensic anthropologists.

"We have probably the most dramatic archival and scientific evidence in 61 years to indicate that we may soon know what happened to Amelia Earhart," Gillespie said Tuesday in a

telephone interview.

The new results will be presented Friday at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia.

Although other Earhart experts are not yet familiar with the new evidence, they cautioned that Gillespie has previously brought forward several other discoveries from Nikumaroro, only to have their identity questioned.

Such earlier discoveries included a piece of aluminum claimed to be from Earhart's plane and a rubber heel allegedly from her shoes. Experts have since concluded that these artifacts were not linked to Earhart, although Gillespie remains a believer.

"I have always been skeptical about claims such as this," said Thomas Crouch of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

"When people ask me what I am looking for, I say it is fair to look for a smoking gun, something that could only have come from them (Earhart and her navigator, Fred Noonan)," he said. Unless the bones can be found, the new data is not a smoking gun, he added. And as of now, no one seems to know where the bones are.

Earhart's fate has captivated the country since she and Noonan disappeared on July 2, 1937, during her effort to be the first woman to fly around the world. The two were flying from Asia to Hawaii and planned a fuel stop at tiny Howland Island. But they did not find the island and reported in their last radio messages that

they were almost out of fuel.

Some experts claim that Earhart and Noonan were captured by the Japanese because they were allegedly spying on Japanese naval operations. Another report had her living in New Jersey writing novels.

Most authorities, however, believe her Lockheed A-10E Electra simply ran out of fuel and crashed into the Pacific Ocean.

Gillespie, a former charter pilot and aircraft accident investigator, was drawn to the case when some associates noted that, based on her compass headings, Earhart could have been flying over Nikumaroro when she ran out of gas. Reports that she sent radio messages for three days after failing to reach Howland suggested she survived the crash.

U.S. planes flew over the island at the time but saw no trace of wreckage.

Gillespie and his colleagues have made five trips to Nikumaroro, about 1,700 miles southwest of Hawaii, but have not yet produced any definitive evidence that Earhart crashed there.

Earlier this year, Gillespie said, one of TIGHAR's 800-odd members stumbled on records in Tarawa suggesting that the skeleton and a wooden box that once contained a nautical sextant were found on Gardner Island in 1940.

A British physician, Dr. D.W. Hoodless, examined the bones and concluded they were male. And the authorities did not think the sextant box came from Earhart's aircraft because it was a type used on ships.

Apparently they did not know that Earhart's navigator customarily carried an old nautical sextant in addition to more modern instruments, Gillespie said.

The bones and box were ordered crated for storage and a report was forwarded to England. No one knows where that crate is now.

Gillespie went to England and ultimately located the report "in a small village 60 miles north of London." The report gave precise bone measurements taken from the most important skeletal remains.

Forensic anthropologists Karen Ramey Burns of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte and Richard L. Jantz of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville independently studied the measurements and concluded that they were from a female and that they could have been Earhart's.

Burns noted that Hoodless did a very careful job, but that he had to use formulas developed by anthropologist Carl Pearson -- to determine sex and ethnic origins -- which were the best available at the time. Newer techniques are much better.

"If I had used the same techniques (as Hoodless)," Burns said, "I probably would have said it was a male also."

Other Earhart aficionados are looking forward to seeing Gillespie's evidence, while Gillespie himself is hoping he can eventually find the bones themselves.

Meanwhile, the new evidence remains simply the latest chapter in the long search for a vanished icon.

## Guns prove fatal to Missouri speed trap

By Jon Jeter  
The Washington Post

MACK'S CREEK, Mo. -- Used to be that this leisurely little town handed out traffic tickets like surplus government cheese.

And the police here didn't discriminate. They ticketed just about anyone who dared drive through this no-stoplight town on Missouri's back roads. They ticketed motorists for speeding. They ticketed them for tailgating and for failing to signal a turn. They stopped motorists who grazed the white lines on the shoulder of the road. They pulled over trucks and tourists and little old ladies who were in no particular hurry and swore they had never sped a day in their lives. One officer here threatened to ticket a boy on his bicycle. Another pulled over a man riding horseback. Seems neither had a taillight.

"If you weren't local," said Cindy Meads, a waitress at Bonnie's Restaurant here, "you got a ticket. That's pretty much the way things worked."

At the height of this town's campaign of traffic terror in the early '90s, Mack's Creek's police force wrote nearly 2,900 tickets annually, an average of eight a day. In 1994, more than three-quarters of the town's revenue -- about \$165,000 a

year -- came from municipal court fines. With no industry to speak of, this town of 272 residents 60 miles north of Springfield had only its own industriousness to rely on for

If you weren't local you got a ticket. That's pretty much the way things worked.

Cindy Meads, local resident

revenue.

And then one day four years ago, a city police officer stopped the wrong guy, a state lawmaker headed home for the weekend. In 1995, state lawmakers cheered and applauded when they voted overwhelmingly in favor of legislation to limit the amount a city can collect from traffic fines, essentially shutting down one of the most famous and feared speed traps in the nation.

Without its cash cow, Mack's Creek is now flat broke and filed for bankruptcy in August. All told, the city owes \$165,000, most of it to the state and federal government.

The IRS has seized the town's bank account, claiming its last \$8,500. The police force -- one part-

time and four full-time officers -- has been disbanded. The patrol cars and radar guns have been sold or repossessed and City Hall is now a senior citizens center.

Gregg Eddins, the new mayor, said he is working with creditors on a payment plan and is optimistic the city eventually will rebound. "It may take eight or 10 years, but we'll work it out," he said. "And if nothing else, at least evil has been purged from our town."

County police patrol Mack's Creek now and there have been no tickets written here in more than a year. With only about \$1,500 in revenue trickling into the coffers each month, Mack's Creek cannot afford even to operate most of the town's street lamps. Residents like 86-year-old Burla Edison pay the utility bills for the street lamps on their blocks from their own pockets.

"I am truly saddened to see that this town of really good, hardworking people has gone bankrupt," said Rep. Delbert Scott, the state legislator who pushed through the new law that restricts the amount of income generated by traffic tickets to 45 percent of a city's total revenue. "But the place was a speed trap. There was nothing subtle about it. Everybody knew it. No town should be able to run their city government entirely on the backs of the

traveling public. This was real highway robbery."

Embarrassed for years by its zealous officers and the town's far-reaching reputation, those who live and work here have shed no tears for its defunct police department. Many say they were glad to retire the ritual of warning visiting friends and relatives to brake their speed to 45 miles per hour -- and not a mile per hour more than that -- as soon as they reached the city limits.

"We're better off without them," said Bonnie Evans, a white-haired woman who owns Bonnie's Restaurant, where everyone in town goes for the fried fruit pies.

"The police here didn't watch over the town," said George Palmer, a convenience store owner here. "They watched the roads."

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