

# DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

# DHAPP

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE HIV/AIDS  
PREVENTION PROGRAM

REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF HIV/AIDS  
AMONG UNIFORMED PERSONNEL IN  
SELECTED AFRICAN NATIONS AND BEYOND

## WINNING BATTLES IN THE WAR AGAINST HIV/AIDS

### BACKGROUND

#### Country Statistics

The population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DROC) is estimated to be 60 million, with an average life expectancy of 51.1 years. French is the official language; the literacy rate is 65.5%, disproportionately distributed between men and women. DROC is experiencing an internal war, which contributes to a weakened economy. Agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economy, accounting for 55% of the country's gross domestic product. The annual per capita income is estimated at \$700.

#### HIV/AIDS Statistics

HIV/AIDS prevalence in DROC is estimated at 4.2%, while the number of people believed to be living with HIV/AIDS is 1.1 million. Identified risk factors include blood transfusions, unprotected sex, heterosexual contact with multiple partners and commercial sex workers, and untreated sexually transmitted infections. Transmission of HIV is primarily through heterosexual activity, which accounts for 87% of the cases in the country. Commercial sex workers have HIV prevalence rates as high as 30%.

#### Military Statistics

The size of the armed forces is estimated between 225,000 and 300,000. Since DROC is becoming more stable, it is expected that the total population of the military will decrease to approximately 75,000-125,000 within the next few years. As of this annual report, no information regarding HIV prevalence in the military was available.

### PROGRAM RESPONSE

#### Military-to-Military Technical Assistance

DHAPP staff provided technical assistance to the DROC military during an in-country assist visit, 30 April–2 May 2005.

The highlight of the technical assistance visit was the development of the Congolese military's plan for future efforts in HIV prevention. In collaboration with the Center for Disease Control and the US Agency for International Development, the country team worked



together on the proposal of a Johns Hopkins program to evaluate HIV prevalence and conduct a knowledge, attitudes, practices, and behavior survey among Congolese military personnel. In addition, plans were developed to establish a peer education program to provide HIV/AIDS facts, and to train master trainers. The Defense Attaché Office at the US Embassy agreed to support the purchase of basic HIV/AIDS laboratory diagnostic equipment to care for HIV-infected military persons and their families. Doctors and nurses will be trained in HIV/AIDS care through the *Military International HIV/AIDS Training Program* and the Infectious Diseases Institute, and physicians participated in an HIV/AIDS counseling and education training workshop in Bangkok (21–25 June 2005). A strategic information database will be created to enhance HIV/AIDS care by computerizing laboratory diagnostics and patient care.



### In-Country Ongoing Assistance

With an interest in expanding their program, the Walter Reed Johns Hopkins Cameroon Program (WRJHCP), traveled to DROC to establish a relationship with their government and local military teams to discuss possible project work in the future, possible objectives, and an implementation plan.

### Proposed Future Activities

A proposal was received on behalf of the DROC military for the 2006 fiscal year. Specific objectives of the proposed project include conducting an HIV prevention campaign in the military, establishing Counseling and Testing (CT) Centers, training CT counselors and educators, training military physicians, and establishing laboratories for HIV tests in military hospitals throughout the country.

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

### Prevention/Care/Treatment

The Walter Reed-Johns Hopkins Cameroon Program is committed to providing technical assistance to Central African militaries to improve their HIV/AIDS prevention programs. To meet this objective, a statement of work was refined for efforts in Cameroon, Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, Chad, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Equatorial Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During the latter part of FY05, initial efforts took place in Cameroon, as well as Gabon, Congo-Brazzaville, and Chad, with emphasis on sexually transmitted infection treatment and care, training military peer educators, and training laboratory technicians on the use of rapid testing kits. Early FY06 efforts will involve Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Equatorial Guinea, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and will expand upon the efforts commenced during FY05. DHAPP anticipates successful programs in all seven Central African militaries and is progressing toward these important targets in prevention and care.

