

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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 Dominican Republic is estimated to be 9.2 million people, with an average life expectancy of 71.7 years. Spanish is the official language of the Dominican Republic, which has an estimated literacy rate of 84.7%, evenly distributed between men and women. The gross domestic product per capita is \$7,500, with 25% of the population of Dominican Republic living below the poverty line. Although the country has long been viewed primarily as an exporter of sugar, coffee, and tobacco, in recent years the service sector has overtaken agriculture as the economy's largest employer due to growth in tourism and free-trade zones. The country suffers from marked income inequality; the poorest half of the population receives less than one fifth of gross national product, while the richest 10% enjoys nearly 40% of the national income.

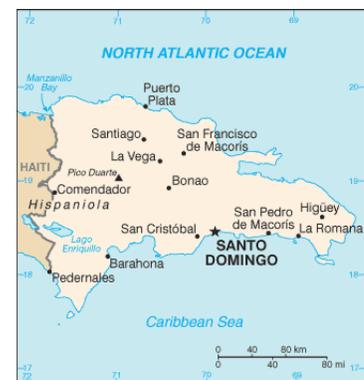
HIV/AIDS Statistics

The HIV prevalence rate in the Dominican Republic general population is estimated at 1.1%. It is estimated that 88,000 Dominicans are living with HIV/AIDS, which is the leading cause of death among Dominican women of reproductive age. Nearly three quarters of all reported HIV cases occur in men. High-risk populations include commercial sex workers and their clients and those with other sexually transmitted infections.

Military Statistics

The Armed Forces of the Dominican Republic (FFAA) consists of approximately 44,000 active-duty personnel, about 30% of whom are used for nonmilitary operations, including providing security. The primary missions are to defend the nation and protect the territorial integrity of the country. The army, twice as large as the other services combined with about 24,000 active-duty personnel, consists of 6 infantry brigades, a combat support brigade and a combat service support brigade. The air force operates 2 main bases, one in the southern region near Santo Domingo and one in the northern region of the country. The navy maintains 7 aging vessels and 4 new vessels. The FFAA is second in size to Cuba's military in the Caribbean. The armed forces participate fully in counter-narcotics efforts. They also are active in efforts to control contraband and illegal immigration from Haiti to the Dominican Republic and from the Dominican Republic to the United States.

The rate of infection among the FFAA ranges from 1.3% to 1.5%, according to the figures registered in the STI/HIV/AIDS service unit of the military hospital and the National Police.



PROGRAM RESPONSE

In-Country Ongoing Assistance

The Center for Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance Medicine (CDHAM), implementing agency for the United States Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences, conducted an initial needs assessment in the Dominican Republic in 2004, with recent follow-on visits to discuss logistics of their proposal to DHAPP.

CDHAM continued work toward a coordinated/collaborative effort with the FFAA and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) Regional Office to further develop like projects to support the military. Military representatives from Latin America and the Caribbean and civilian representatives from national and international agencies met in November to discuss HIV/AIDS within the FFAA.

Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received three proposals on behalf of the FFAA for fiscal year 2007 activities. The first, from CDHAM, included the following objectives: raise awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention among students in training schools and military universities; establish counseling services; promote adequate condom use and ensure adequate provision and distribution; and strengthen the FFAA capacity to implement, monitor, and evaluate HIV/AIDS prevention activities.

The second proposal, received from Project HOPE, emphasized the following objectives: conduct quality peer education at the troop level, provide basic HIV counseling and testing services to military members, and provide quality care and treatment to people living with HIV/AIDS.

The third proposal, received from Cicatelli Associates Incorporated, listed the following objectives: work closely with the FFAA, the National AIDS Program, and the Ministry of Health to assess needs and resources, develop an implementation plan, and establish strong lines of communication; establish in-country staff to provide management and coordination; establish a seroprevalence and behavioral surveillance system for the FFAA; and develop a master trainer program for identified military master prevention trainers.

All three proposals were reviewed by a scientific review board and will be submitted to the DHAPP Board of Directors for funding decisions.

OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Prevention

CDHAM has worked to gain the support of the leadership, including providing technical assistance to one indigenous organization (FFAA) in the areas of capacity building and policy development. However, toward the end of the current reporting period, momentum in these efforts was slowed, due to a variety of significant personnel issues and competing activities for collaborators. CDHAM continues its diligent work to reestablish momentum with increased trust and growing support for the program at the highest levels in the FFAA.