



**ESTONIA**

**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 Estonian population is estimated to be 1.3 million people, with an average life expectancy of 72.0 years. Estonian is the official language, and the literacy rate is estimated at 99.8%, evenly distributed between men and women. Forcibly incorporated into the USSR in 1940, Estonia regained its freedom in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the last Russian troops left in 1994, Estonia has been free to promote economic and political ties with Western Europe. It joined both NATO and the European Union in the spring of 2004. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is \$17,500, with 5% of Estonian people living below the poverty line.

Estonia supports the United States and NATO with an infantry platoon in Iraq, de-mining specialists in Afghanistan, and security forces in Bosnia/Kosovo.

#### **HIV/AIDS Statistics**

The HIV prevalence rate in Estonia's general population is 1.3%, with 10,000 people currently living with HIV/AIDS. The main driving force behind the epidemic in Estonia is intravenous drug use. Youth and young adults are more severely affected than other age groups. Other vulnerable groups include commercial sex workers, men who have sex with men, and prisoners.

#### **Military Statistics**

The Estonian Defense Forces (EDF) is estimated at approximately 5000 members. Estonia allocates 2.0% of the GDP for military expenditures. Military HIV prevalence rates are unknown.

### **PROGRAM RESPONSE**

#### **In-Country Ongoing Assistance**

To date, regular education for conscripts, military school students, and deployable forces is provided, but only within a 16-hour package of medical lectures, which leaves approximately 1-2 hours of lectures for all communicable and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. Basic facts, concept of a disease, and prognosis are explained.

In fiscal year 2003, under the Northern Europe Initiative program, the US Embassy financed

a program titled *HIV/AIDS prevention among recruits of Estonian Defense Forces.* Interactive 2- and 4-hour trainings for 1742 conscripts age 19 were implemented at that time.

In FY05, another 120 training sessions for 1817 vocational school students and 30 4-hour training sessions for 450 army conscripts were implemented on the following topics: development of communication, negotiation, and refusal skills; information on risks of drug use and unprotected sex; safe sex to prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted pregnancy; harm reduction during the use of illicit drugs; attitudes toward unsafe sex and drug use; development of social skills to understand social pressure; and development of values and positive group norms.

In FY06, US European Command sponsored a US Department of Defense physician who spoke to EDF medical personnel about US efforts to prevent HIV/AIDS in the US military. She also spoke about military efforts in other countries in fighting the disease and the misinformation around it. Finally, EDF medical leaders have attended three main HIV/AIDS prevention conferences, which have helped in strategic planning work.

### Proposed Future Activities

DHAPP received a proposal for FY07 activities from the EDF. The overall objectives of the proposed activities included increasing conscript, soldier, and leader HIV/AIDS prevention awareness through a military-wide training program; distribution of Estonian language information packets, which will be a plastic coated sleeve that contains basic facts about HIV/AIDS, a code of conduct for uniformed services, prevention instructions, and a pocket to safely carry a condom; and the use of rapid HIV tests to screen all conscripts and deploying/redeploying soldiers.

The proposal was reviewed by a scientific panel and will be submitted to the DHAPP Board of Directors.

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

DHAPP staff members have continued collaborative efforts with Estonian military officials and US Embassy staff to establish a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention/education program for military members in Estonia. DHAPP looks forward to successful program implementation in Estonia.

