African First Ladies Unite Against Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission

At a U.N. side event, the Organization of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS announces strategies to fight perinatal HIV and syphilis.

October 1, 2014 By Casey Halter

On Tuesday, September 23, representatives from the Organization of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA) took a break from the United Nations General Assembly to meet with UNAIDS, the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPFF) and Alere, one of the world's leaders in HIV testing technologies, to discuss intensifying efforts to end mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis throughout Africa.

Hinda Deby, the first lady of the Republic of Chad and president of OAFLA, takes the podium to discuss the organization's plan to end mother-to-child transmission of both HIV and syphilis.

The working lunch and press conference was held at New York City's Ford Foundation headquarters, located across the street from the United Nations in midtown Manhattan.

At the event, several African first ladies took to the stage to pledge to end the AIDS epidemic in their countries by 2030 through increasing access to HIV testing, care and treatment among women and children, and to help ensure that no babies are born with the virus by 2015.

Representatives from OAFLA, UNAIDS, the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF) and Alere meet over lunch to discuss their new multinational partnership.

The latest international HIV/AIDS stats were also overviewed at the event. Here's a sample:

- In sub-Saharan Africa, an estimated 260,000 babies are infected with HIV every year.
- Nearly 40 percent of pregnant women living with HIV around the world do not receive antiretroviral treatment to reduce their chances of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) during pregnancy.
- Without any health interventions, it is estimated that 45 percent of HIV-positive mothers will infect their children with HIV, which can also be transmitted during labor, childbirth and through breast-feeding.

OAFLA also paid special attention to ending Africa's syphilis epidemic, a sexually transmitted infection that can also be passed from mothers to fetuses during pregnancy. Syphilis increases a young one's chance of HIV infection by 180 percent. It is estimated that about 1.4 million pregnant

women have active syphilis infections around the world and almost 1.5 million are HIV infected.

Some of the biggest news at the event was Alere's pledge to donate 100,000 new HIV/syphilis Duo rapid tests to countries in Africa to help OAFLA tackle these health threats throughout Africa. According to the tech company's latest specs, the machines can give detailed viral counts for HIV and syphilis in about 60 minutes, based off of one blood sample. The machine has the potential to vastly improve testing efficacy in Africa's remote regions, where results often take weeks to come through because of gaps in access to health care and laboratory testing.

For more information about OAFLA's pledge to end AIDS in Africa, click here.

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