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Uganda shuns gays in anti-HIV drive

Mon 2 Jun 2008, 10:18 GMT

By Frank Nyakairu

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KAMPALA (Reuters) - Uganda's government said on Monday it would not focus any of its HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programmes on outlawed homosexuals because the east African country is short of funds.

"Gays are one of the drivers of HIV in Uganda, but because of meagre resources we cannot direct our programmes at them at this time," the chairman of the Uganda AIDS Commission, Kihumuro Apuuli, told reporters in the capital Kampala.

He said the government planned to focus its work on other high risk groups such as sex workers, truck drivers, remote fishing communities and members of the armed forces.

Most homosexuals hide their sexual preferences in Uganda, where courts can punish homosexual acts with a life sentence in prison, and even "attempted" homosexuality can draw a jail term of seven years.

Local activists estimate the homosexual community at 500,000 people out of 27 million in Uganda.

More than one million Ugandans are HIV positive.

Apuuli's comments came ahead of a major AIDS meeting slated to start in Kampala on Tuesday.

(Editing by Daniel Wallis)

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