



(It was a hyena that killed the boy, but four elderly women got the blame. Villagers slashed them with machetes then set fire to their bodies for casting spells on the wild animal. "They cut her with machetes," said Sufia Shadrack, the daughter of one of the murdered women in her small village in Tanzania's northern Mwanza district. "Then they took firewood, mattresses, an iron sheet and burned her like you would cook fish or meat.")

BURUNDI :

RWANDA :

Rwanda Tribunal Has Still to Complete Longest Trial

Hirondelle News Agency (Lausanne)/22 January 2015

Arusha — The most complicated trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) is not finished. Although the Tribunal was due to close its doors at the end of 2014, the UN Security Council in December had to renew the mandate of certain judges to complete the longest trial in the history of international justice, which includes the only woman indicted by the ICTR, as well as five others.

This trial, which includes ex-minister Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, is unlikely to be finished before the second half of this year, according to ICTR forecasts.

As well as its length, this trial also has other particularities that make it unique in the history of international justice. Nyiramasuhuko is not just only the only woman indicted by the ICTR but also by an international criminal court, and the allegations against her include rape.

She became a member of the former Rwandan government after belated university studies, and is on trial with her son, Arsène Shalom Ntahobali, among others. Now a grandmother, this Christian woman who is never seen without her rosary was sentenced to life in prison by the trial court for acts including rape committed at her command. And according to the trial court judgment, one of those who raped Tutsi women and girls was none other than her son, Shalom, at the time a young, newly married university student.

According to the trial court judges, the former minister "conspired with other members of the interim government to commit genocide in Butare (southern Rwanda)". They said she exercised command authority over Interahamwe militia who committed rape in the offices of the Butare prefect.

Pauline Nyiramasuhuko and her Canadian lawyer Nicole Bergevin have always claimed she was victim of a smear campaign orchestrated by the current Rwandan regime of Paul Kagame's Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

"It's an abomination to claim that Pauline Nyiramasuhuko went so far as to order her son to rape young Tutsi women," said Bergevin in her final arguments in April 2009.

Nyiramasuhuko expressed the same sentiment when she addressed the court in her own defence in September 2005. "How can you imagine that a woman like me would do such things?" she said.

But her words did not convince the trial judges, and she is now awaiting her appeals hearing, for which the date is yet to be set.

Conflict of interests:

Another particularity of this trial is its complexity, due notably to the number of accused persons: six in total. It is the biggest joint trial in the history of the ICTR, which had to abandon its initial plan for a mega-trial.

Nyiramasuhuko and the other people tried with her are all from the Butare prefecture in southern Rwanda. Thus it has been dubbed the "Butare trial". Two of the other five accused, former Butare prefect Sylvain Nsabimana and former mayor Joseph Kanyabashi, were members of the Social Democrat Party (PSD), a small party in opposition to the former single party MRND, to which Nyiramasuhuko and her family remained loyal. In their defence, Nsabimana and Kanyabashi tried to convince the judges that only the MRND could have incited the massacres in Butare. But Nyiramasuhuko and her son responded that although the MRND was popular in other regions of Rwanda, notably the north, it had little support in the south, especially the university town of Butare.

This conflict of interest between the accused was often visible during the hearings, with heated exchanges between the lawyers, to the grand satisfaction of the prosecution.

This trial will also go down in history as the longest and no doubt the costliest in the history of international justice. Started in June 2001, the hearings were especially long, because of difficulties with the witnesses and the slowness of questioning, which Tanzanian presiding judge William Hussein Sekule had difficulty cutting short. Many expert witnesses also appeared in the case, many

of whom remained for months in the witness box. Not forgetting the onerous work of translation. For example, the trial court judgment was handed down in English on June 24, 2011, but the French version was only distributed to the six convicts in 2013. Yet they could not exercise their right to appeal without having read the judgment in a language they understand.

According to Danish judge Vagn Joensen, president of the ICTR, the deadline for filing appeals ended in October 2013 and the appeals hearing is expected in March, whereas the final appeals judgment is not expected until at least August. The trial will thus have lasted more than 14 years and Shalom's mother, now 69, will have spent 16 years in preventive detention.

ER/ JC

RDC CONGO :

UGANDA :

SOUTH AFRICA :

South Africa Sees Record Year for Rhino Poaching

Brian Clark Howard/National Geographic/January 22, 2015

More than 1,200 rhinos were illegally killed in 2014 in the country.

South Africa, home to the overwhelming majority of the world's wild rhinos, saw more of the animals poached last year than ever before, its government announced on Thursday. There were 1,215 rhinos illegally killed in the country in 2014, a 21 percent increase from the 1,004 rhinos killed in 2013, according to South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs.

"If poaching is allowed to increase at the rates of the previous few years, it could drive the population to extinction in the next decade or two," says Matthew Lewis, an African species expert with World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Species Conservation Program.

The killing has been driven by demand for rhino horns in Asia, especially in Vietnam and China, where some people believe the keratin-based horns can cure them of various ailments (that claim is disputed by Western scientists).

The poaching rate for South Africa's rhinos, about 6 percent of the country's population each year, is equal to the birth rate there, says Lewis. If it gets worse, the species could decline rapidly toward extinction. (See "Rhino Wars" in National Geographic magazine.)

South Africa is home to an estimated 18,000 white rhinos and 1,700 to 1,800 black rhinos. The country did not specify how many of the rhinos killed last year were white or black, but Lewis says past studies have shown that more than 90 percent of the rhinos killed there were white. The larger

white rhinos are more abundant and tend to spend more time out in the open, where they make easier targets for poachers.

About 26,000 rhinos in total live in several other countries in Africa, and they face high poaching pressure across their range. (Learn about the recent controversy over a legal rhino hunt.)

Poaching Hot Spot

Nearly two-thirds of the rhinos killed in South Africa last year were shot by poachers in Kruger National Park, which holds the majority of the country's rhinos. The park is one of the world's largest, at 7,523 square miles (19,485 square kilometers), which is bigger than the state of Connecticut. Set in northeastern South Africa, the park shares a porous border with Mozambique, one of the poorest countries in the world.

"Poachers can easily slip across the border into the park and make themselves rich in one night's time," says Lewis.

Poaching rates have shot up dramatically since 2007. Before then, only 10 to 15 rhinos were poached in South Africa a year.

The surge has been driven by high prices for rhino horn on the black market (\$30,000 a pound, about the street price of cocaine), in part due to rising wealth in East Asia, says Lewis. Trade in rhino parts is illegal due to international agreements. But many countries have been lax about enforcement.

The increase in the poaching rate of rhinos has leveled off somewhat in the past couple of years.

"Year on year, comparatively speaking, the increase in the rate of poaching has slowed since 2012," South Africa's Minister of Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa said in a statement on Thursday. "Nevertheless, the figures remain worryingly high."

South Africa: Violence Erupts in Soweto

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/JAN. 22, 2015

About 70 people have been arrested in the Soweto area of Johannesburg over protests and looting, much of it aimed at shops owned by residents from other countries, local news media reported Thursday. People in the area began looting shops and attacking foreign residents after a foreign shopkeeper was accused of shooting and killing a teenager on Monday, the South African Press Association said. The 14-year-old boy was reportedly in a group that tried to rob the shop. The targeted shops were owned by Ethiopians, Somalis and Pakistanis, witnesses said.

South Africa police arrest 121 after looting of foreign-owned shops

Jan 23, 2015/AFP

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) - South African police said Friday they had arrested 121 people after mobs went on a looting spree of grocery stores owned by foreign nationals in Johannesburg's Soweto township.

Dozens now face charges of public violence - including a police officer caught on film participating in the looting, Lieutenant-General Lesetja Mothiba, police commissioner of South Africa's

economic hub Gauteng, said at a press conference Friday.

The violence erupted after a foreign shopkeeper shot dead a teenager who had allegedly tried to rob him on Monday night in the iconic township.

"Young boys wanted to rob a shop and the owner opened fire and killed one of them," police spokesman Kay Makhubela told AFP. "That made the community angry, and that's what started all this." At least 80 shops, most of them owned by Somalis, have been looted over the past few days, he said.

TANZANIA :

Murder and magic as Tanzania tackles 'witchcraft' killings

Date: Jan 23, 2015/newvision

MAGU - It was a hyena that killed the boy, but four elderly women got the blame. Villagers slashed them with machetes then set fire to their bodies for casting spells on the wild animal.

"They cut her with machetes," said Sufia Shadrack, the daughter of one of the murdered women in her small village in Tanzania's northern Mwanza district. "Then they took firewood, mattresses, an iron sheet and burned her like you would cook fish or meat."

In Tanzania, hundreds of people are killed each year accused of being witches.

Like Shadrack's mother, many victims are elderly, vulnerable or marginalised - or own property that greedy relatives seize after accusing of witchcraft.

But while some are killed falsely accused of black magic, others are murdered by the "sorcerers" themselves: scores of people with albinism have been killed and their body parts cooked up for spells.

After UN condemnation, the government this month promised a crackdown to stem attacks.

However, activists fear promises may prove little more than rhetoric, as previous government measures have had little or no impact on the deep seated beliefs.

"I am worried about getting older," said 50-year-old Shadrack, who must walk past the charred wreckage of her mother's house to visit her grave.

"The ones who killed my mother, I don't know how they think about me," she added. "Maybe they will kill me too."

Sacrifices to prevent evil

Tanzanian rights groups recorded 765 witchcraft related murders in 2013, but warn the real figure is likely far higher.

"The huge number of people who have been killed only includes cases reported," said Paul Mikongoti from the Legal and Human Rights Centre. "There are so many people that we can't get

the number."

Simply having bloodshot eyes can be a sign of "witchcraft", something all too common after decades spent cooking over smoky fires.

At least 74 albinos have been murdered since 2000, according to United Nations experts, who say an entire corpse can fetch \$75,000 (64,500 euros), a fortune in the impoverished country.

Observers say attacks against albinos are increasing as Tanzania's October 2015 national elections looms, encouraging political campaigners to turn to witchdoctors for good luck.

Beliefs of the east African country's 49 million people are roughly divided equally between Islam, Christianity and traditional religions.

But some 93 percent also believe in witchcraft, by far the highest level recorded in a 19-nation African survey by the PEW Research Center in 2010.

All about my inheritance

While Tanzanian law gives women equal inheritance rights many oppose that, and activists say some relatives use witchcraft as an excuse to grab property.

"Normally men like to dominate... but when the sisters start to be a bit resistant they think the only way to access that property -- be it cows, be it farms -- is to claim this lady is a witch," said Flavian Bifandimu from HelpAge, which advocates for the rights of older people.

"That justifies her death, then automatically the man will take the property. Simple as that."

Mage Benge, from the small village of Magu, was attacked five years ago after she was accused of using spells to kill her parents. Men hacked her with machetes before leaving her for dead.

"It was all about my inheritance, cows and farmland," said Benge - adding that had she been able to use magic, she would have protected herself.

Instead, she shows her scarred face, and says she still sees some of the men who attacked her walking free in her village.

"They hurt me badly and made me poor," she said. "Before I could farm on my own, now I am a beggar."

The witchcraft ban does not cover traditional healers who use herbs to help the sick, which two-thirds of Tanzanians use, according to government surveys.

In a small hut, traditional healer Hana Mazoya warns of unscrupulous pretenders.

"If you tell the patient that they have been bewitched by somebody, you just create a conflict between the two, that is when killings can happen," said Mazoya, dressed in a beaded crown of long black feathers.

She divines the future, but says the spirits that guide her do not dabble in the dangerous practice of denouncing witches.

"My ghosts do not know wizards," she said.

AFP

Tanzania: Blackout As South Sudan Pact Signing Underway

By Marc Nkwame/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/23 January 2015

Arusha — IT was total panic on Wednesday night when four presidents, three vice-presidents and numerous top government officials from five countries were plunged into total darkness here when the South Sudan peace pact was about to be inked.

Presidents Jakaya Kikwete, Uhuru Kenyatta, Salvar Kiir and Yoweri Museveni from Tanzania, Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda, respectively, together with Vice-Presidents Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa), Riek Machar (South Sudan) and Dr Gharib Bilal (Tanzania) were at a loss when the conference room they were in experienced power blackout.

That was the situation inside Victoria Hall at Ngurdoto Mountain Lodge on Wednesday night when the South Sudan Peace Accord was in the process of being signed in Arusha.

The fact that the warring Juba factions were still at war back home and the animosity prevailed during the preceding hours of the day, the sudden power outage caused panic in no little measure.

The situation became even more perplexing when a sudden 'boom' was heard from a raised block at the rear of the conference room where various television crews had set up their huge cameras.

Apparently one of the foreign journalists who had brought along a large suitcase for his equipment had somehow let the latter drop from the platform onto the floor with a deafening crash.

And while the South Sudanese peace pact was supposed to be signed before midday on Wednesday, preceding disagreements between the groups in discussions almost caused the process to be halted, resulting in various changes to the programme.

"Our biggest problem in Africa is that many leaders don't want to take collective responsibility," stated Mr Abdulrahman Kinana, Secretary General of Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) while chatting with journalists outside the venue at noon. His party was coordinating the Juba conflict resolution process in Arusha.

"I have just returned from South Sudan. The situation there is pathetic, dead bodies are strewn all over the place because it is no longer easy to clear them. This time around even the carcasses of killed cattle are piling up in the streets, causing horrible site and stench," he said.

South Sudan President Salvar Kiir and his opponent, Riek Machar, for most part of the day did not seem to see eye-to-eye and neither were their supporters. Loud and angry shouts could be heard at various group meetings under tree shades or at the swimming pool.

It was until after the official signing had been completed and shortly after Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta had completed making his speech that he begged the two leaders to shake hands, which they did strongly, though they did not embrace, even though they hugged other leaders in the audience.

KENYA :

Kenya weighs Chinese request for extradition of 76 held for cyber crime

BY Reuters/Friday, January 23rd 2015

Kenya is considering a request from Beijing to extradite 76 Chinese nationals charged with cyber crime for trial in their homeland, Kenya's attorney-general said on Thursday. Githu Muigai said he expected a decision soon on the request from a "friendly government" with which Kenya has strong trade and industrial ties. Some 76 Chinese nationals have been detained by Kenyan police investigating allegations of cyber crime, operating private radio services and being in the country illegally, their lawyers said on Dec. 5. "We have received requests from the government of China, which is a friendly government, to surrender these persons to be prosecuted for offences in China ... A decision will be made in the very near future," Muigai told reporters in Geneva. Any agreement would have to meet Kenya's justice standards, he said, adding their alleged criminality involved "the security of banking, credit cards and other operations". "I would not be surprised if the majority of the persons arrested were mere operatives and who probably wouldn't attract a sentence beyond five years," he added. "But there are major masterminds of what the Chinese government itself has stated to be international criminal elements. And obviously around them there would be more serious charges and probably more severe penalties." Muigai, speaking to the United Nations Human Rights Council earlier in the day, said Kenya had undertaken wide-ranging reforms to improve access to justice and the rule of law.

ANGOLA :

AU/AFRICA :

Africa's Growth In The Next Decade Will Rest On These Pillars

January 23, 2015/ventures-africa.com

VENTURES AFRICA – In stark contrast to most of the rest of the world, the African economy is growing at a rate that qualifies it to be called the second fastest-growing region on earth. The continent has severely attracted international capital and provides a good return on these investments even though it is still plagued with gaps in infrastructure and security. But, going forward, the game may be changing such that Africa's success will only be guaranteed if it plays by a different set of rules.

This is the submission of global consultancy Deloitte in its latest report on Africa. Essentially, the report assesses how the African market has developed, how perceptions of Africa have changed, and how consumers are responding to a period of rapid economic growth. In this changing tide, business strategies need to be tailored to the specifics of each market or sub-region if they are to succeed. According to the report, the consumer opportunity in Africa rests on five key pillars: the rise of the middle class, exponential population growth, the dominance of youth, rapid urbanization and fast adoption of digital technologies.

An increasingly diversifying African economy has supported an emerging middle class that has driven demand for consumer goods and services as well as luxury brands. With expected growth rates of about 8 percent per annum, rising consumer demand is forecast to add \$1.1 trillion to African GDP by 2019, and Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt are positioning to leverage this. Within 12 years since the dawn of the current millennium, the continent's aggregate household final consumption expenditure grew at an average annual rate of 10.7 percent to nearly hit the \$1.3 trillion mark. In 2013, there were over 375 million middle class people living in Africa, or 34 percent of the population, and the report projects a possible half a billion middle class African citizens by 2030.

A significant proportion of Africans are aged between 15 and 24, about 200 million citizens or 20 percent of the population. This specific demographic segment is projected to grow to 321 million by 2030 and blow up significant opportunities across the continent for consumer goods. The current trend is that of Africans becoming increasingly brand sensitive and choosing quality over price in many instances, this is surely an incentive for the producers of these goods.

Africa's population is also increasingly clustered in large urban centers, and urbanization will be a key driver of economic activity. According to the report, many urban areas will cross national boundaries, linking major populations and creating sizable markets and trade opportunities.

The growth of mobile digital technologies has allowed Africans to leapfrog poor landline infrastructure and evolve into a world leader in mobile technologies such as the mobile internet and mobile money. The mobile channel has become the primary channel for accessing the Internet, and there still exists a lot of room for growth seeing as just about 20 percent of the African population is online.

With these trends in place, the Africa of the next decade promises to be a significantly transformed and super connected continent filled with creative youngsters and tremendous opportunities for all.

By Emmanuel Iruobe

'Africa Remains Attractive To Foreign Investors Despite Challenges'

leadership.ng/Olushola Bello/ Jan 23, 2015

Members of the 'Achieving Africa's Growth Agenda' panel discussion at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2015 said Africa has remained an attractive region for foreign investment despite the economic and security challenges faced by the continent.

The annual meeting held in Switzerland, yesterday, has panelists which include South African president, Jacob Zuma; Rwandan president, Paul Kagame; the Nigeria Stock Exchange (NSE) chief executive, Oscar Onyema; chairman of Flour Mills of Nigeria, John Coumantaros and chairman of Bharti Enterprises, Sunil Bharti Mittal.

The panelists agreed that despite the security challenges in Nigeria relating to the Boko Haram insurgency, falling commodity prices and the lack of infrastructure, foreign investors have continued to pour funds into the continent.

According to Zuma, Africa has faced a lot of challenges historically. But over the years, we have reduced the amount of conflict in the region.

Onyema, making his contribution, said, "When investors look at the countries they want to invest

their resources, they have to consider risks, but this applies to every region, not just Africa. You have to ensure that your assets are safe. Most of the challenges Africa is facing are isolated. I believe there is a risk but it's not as big as we make it out to be."

He noted that Africa got about \$57 billion in foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2013, showing the confidence that the investor community has in Africa.

For Mittal, "Most African countries and industries offer worthy investment opportunities and small pockets of terrorism shouldn't chase investors away. Africa has enjoyed 10 years of peace which brought in a lot of investment. Gone are the days of Africa relying on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for financial aid."

However, the panelists did indicate that the continent faces a number of issues that need to be resolved before the region can achieve optimal growth.

Ebola crisis: Experimental vaccine 'shipped to Liberia'

By Smitha Mundasad Health reporter, BBC News/23 January 2015

The first batch of an experimental vaccine against Ebola is on its way to Liberia.

The shipment will be the first potentially preventative medicine to reach one of the hardest hit countries.

But experts say that, with Ebola cases falling, it may be difficult to establish whether the jab offers any protection against the virus.

It has been produced by British company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) and the US National Institutes of Health.

Meaningful protection

GSK said a plane carrying some 300 initial doses of the vaccine was expected to arrive in Monrovia on Friday.

The company hopes the first volunteer will be immunised in the next few weeks.

The chief executive of GSK, Sir Andrew Witty, said the pace of development was almost unparalleled and was comparable to only the development of a pandemic flu vaccine or new medicines for HIV.

He told the BBC: "As an example we have delayed two other vaccine development programmes to free up the space to do this work, so this has come with a significant amount of disruption."

Scientists aim to involve 30,000 volunteers in the trial in total, including frontline health workers.

If all regulations are met, 10,000 volunteers will be given the GSK vaccine.

A matching number will get a placebo, dummy vaccine. And there are plans for a further 10,000 people to get a separate experimental jab.

The results will be compared to see if either vaccine offers any meaningful protection against the

virus.

A version of the vaccine has already been tested on 200 healthy volunteers across the UK, US, Switzerland and Mali.

GSK says it has been found to have an acceptable safety profile so far.

But it is only in affected countries that experts can determine whether it provides adequate protection against the virus.

Dr Moncef Slaoui, of GlaxoSmithKline said: "Shipping the vaccine today is a major achievement and shows that we remain on track with the accelerated development of our candidate Ebola vaccine.

"The initial phase one data we have seen are encouraging and give us confidence to progress to the next phases of clinical testing."

The company stresses the vaccine is still in development and the World Health Organization, and other regulators, would have to be satisfied the vaccine is both safe and effective before any mass immunisation campaigns could be considered.

Field trials of other promising vaccines - for example one involving the company Merck - are planned in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in the months to come.

And there are reports that a trial of an experimental drug called Zmapp might start in the next few weeks.

Falling opportunities

However, experts say with the number of Ebola cases falling opportunities to test vaccines and drugs could be limited.

Prof Jonathan Ball, a virus expert based at Nottingham University, told the BBC: "Because case numbers are starting to come down it will become harder and harder to show if the vaccine is having any impact.

"Ultimately we may be in position in a few months time where we don't know whether this vaccine is effective in humans.

"But it is important to get answers if we can - if not for this outbreak, for future outbreaks. We need to be prepared."

Central African Republic: Security Council renews sanctions amid 'continuous cycle' of violence
date : January 22, 2015/en.starafrica.com

NEW YORK, 22 January 2015 / PRN Africa / — Strongly condemning the resurgence of deadly violence across the Central African Republic (CAR), the United Nations Security Council today reinvigorated its sanctions against those individuals implicated in the country's ongoing sectarian tensions which have pushed it to the brink of all-out conflict.

In today's unanimously adopted resolution, the 15-member Council expressed 'grave concern' at the continuing destabilization of the CAR by armed groups, warning that the situation poses 'a

permanent threat to the peace, security and stability of the country' while also constituting a threat to international peace and security in the region.

The Council renewed a series of sanctions targeting all individuals involved in undermining 'the peace, stability and security of the CAR,' calling on all Member States to maintain a series of measures, including an arms embargo, travel ban and asset freeze which would continue until 29 January 2016.

More than two years of civil war and sectarian violence have displaced thousands of people in the CAR amid continuing clashes between the mainly Muslim Séléka alliance and anti-Balaka militia, which are mostly Christian.

Among the severe concerns afflicting the country, noted the Council, is the 'continuous cycle of provocations and reprisals by armed groups,' repeated human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, sexual violence, and the denial of humanitarian access to the thousands of people affected by the worsening security conditions.

According to UN estimates, nearly 440,000 people remain displaced inside the country while some 190,000 have sought asylum across the borders. At the same time, more than 36,000 people – including the Peuhl ethnic group – remain trapped in enclaves across the country, hoping to find asylum in neighbouring States.

On that note, the Council Members stressed the 'urgent and imperative' need to end impunity in the CAR and reiterated the need for all perpetrators of violent acts to be held accountable, noting that some acts "may amount to crimes" under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Yesterday at UN Headquarters in New York, the Council mandated team of investigators warned that war crimes are being committed in the CAR and called for the establishment of a 'truly international' tribunal with international judges who could objectively investigate and prosecute perpetrators of such crimes in the war torn country.

On Monday, UN 'blue helmets' captured Rodrigue Ngaibona, leader of the anti-Balaka militia, in the Organization's first high-profile arrest of 2015.

Since September 2014, the UN integrated stabilization Mission, known by its French acronym, MINUSCA, has arrested over 200 individuals in its support to the CAR authorities to maintain rule of law.

Nonetheless, the situation in the country remains tenuous, with Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Hervé Ladsous, recently warning that the atmosphere in the Central African Republic was potentially explosive.

SOURCE UN News Centre

Ebola Vaccine, Drug Trials to Begin in West Africa

By Kimberly Leonard/usnews.com/Jan. 22, 2015

There is still no vaccine or cure for the virus, but large-scale clinical trials are coming soon.

U.S. health officials and pharmaceutical companies said Thursday they are beginning testing of

Ebola vaccines and treatment drugs in Liberia and Sierra Leone — an announcement made just hours after the World Health Organization reported the spread of the virus has slowed significantly.

Still, health officials agree there could be a resurgence of the disease and said Thursday in a call with reporters that they want to have a vaccine ready in case of another outbreak.

"There is no way to eradicate [Ebola]," Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institutes of Health, said in the call.

Despite the slowing spread of the infection, WHO urges caution, calling on countries to continue screening travelers. So far, 21,000 cases have been confirmed and more than 8,600 deaths have been attributed to the virus. The West African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea have been most affected by the disease.

No scientifically proven cure or vaccine exists for the virus — a reality health officials hope to change after clinical trials, which are scheduled to begin in a few weeks. The only known way to manage Ebola is through supportive care, such as intravenous hydration to treat symptoms like severe diarrhea and vomiting that can cause loss of fluids.

Some health care workers have been given blood transfusions from Ebola survivors to help treat the virus, but because the method has not undergone clinical trials its effectiveness is uncertain. Some have survived with, or perhaps despite, the measure. Others have not.

Releasing a drug or vaccine for public use can take up to a decade in some cases, but with the rapid spread of Ebola last year and the heavy death toll that accompanied it, the government allowed a shortened timeline. Still, clinical trials for a vaccine will take at least nine months.

In Liberia, researchers plan to test vaccines on 27,000 people over the course of nine months to a year, Fauci says. The trials will be phases 2 and 3 — the phases researchers use to determine whether a vaccine works when compared with a placebo and whether it is safe and effective even when combined with other drugs.

Two vaccines are being tested — one was developed by GlaxoSmithKline with NIH and the other by NewLink Genetics in Canada with Merck & Co. Trials will be administered in a partnership between NIH and the Liberian government. They will determine whether the vaccines prevent people from getting Ebola and will aim to discover whether one of the drugs is more effective than the other.

In Sierra Leone, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will test 6,000 people in clinical trials, though health officials have not yet decided which of the vaccines will be used.

"There are still many steps that can be taken before the trial can be launched," Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, said in the call with reporters. She added that the agency did not want to "cut corners with the science."

Among those taking part in the Sierra Leone clinical trials will be health care workers, Schuchat said. WHO reported Thursday that 828 health care workers have been infected in the three worst-hit countries. Of those, 499 died. Because the virus can spread only through person-to-person contact, health workers are particularly vulnerable to exposure.

Treatments for patients infected with Ebola also are on the way. Health officials said they soon will begin phase 1 and phase 2 clinical trials of ZMapp, an experimental drug that was administered to a few American patients who contracted the virus. ZMapp is being developed by Mapp Biopharmaceutical Inc. and is awaiting approval from the Food and Drug Administration. It will be tested in both the U.S. and Liberia.

Officials said in the call that enough ZMapp has been made to supply the trials. Dr. Robin Robinson, director of the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority, said that if the testing is successful the treatment will be available for commercial use by the end of the year.

Futurology: Bill Gates Predicts a Prosperous Africa in 2030

By Tom Risen/usnews.com/ Jan. 22, 2015

The Internet will boost education, charity and banking by 2030, Bill and Melinda Gates predict.

The future of the Internet looks bright but the next 15 years will be even better for medicine, agriculture and other sectors that could slash poverty and boost the middle class in regions like Africa, according to predictions from Microsoft founder-turned global philanthropist Bill Gates.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation since 2000 has funded projects around the world to combat poverty and encourage education using the personal funds of the billionaire couple, which painted a bright outlook for 2030 in their charity's annual letter published on Wednesday. Trends that will raise people out of poverty during the coming years include improvements in local farming to combat famine, software that will boost education and mobile banking that will generate consumer savings and stimulate everyday charity efforts, the couple predicts.

"It's great that more people in rich countries will be able to watch movies on super hi-resolution screens," the letter says. "It's even better that more parents in poor countries will know their children aren't going to die."

Mobile banking could be a significant driver to boost prosperity since 2.5 billion adults don't currently have a bank account because of the costs of working with a bank, the letter states. Companies like Apple, Square and Amazon are developing services to enable people to make purchases through their mobile phones, so that trend is poised to boom during the next 15 years. Improvements in software will also make it easier for students to attend classes online, making education more affordable and accessible, along with making it easier for teachers to plan lessons, the foundation predicts.

Developing nations must also remove cultural and economic barriers that discourage women from using the Internet, the Gates' letter explains.

"To make the most of these innovations, we need to close the gender gap," the letter says. "In Africa, women are 24 percent less likely than men to own a cell phone; in South Asia, it's 37 percent."

Internet access is becoming more available in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa because of the boom in mobile phone technology, but only 19 percent of people on that continent are using the Web, according to the International Telecommunications Union, which is a United Nations agency.

Greater access to and advances in medicine and farming will also eliminate diseases like polio, elephantiasis, river blindness, and blinding trachoma by 2030, the letter predicts. Malaria will remain a threat, but Gates predicts research to eradicate it will improve. Technology, like the methods used to track Ebola, is also making it easier to plot out the presence of a virus in a region.

"The drugs that can stop these scourges are now being donated in huge numbers by pharmaceutical companies, and they're being used more strategically thanks to advances in digital maps that show where diseases are most prevalent," the Gates' letter says. "Last year these free medicines were

distributed to 800 million people.”

Food production will be a crucial challenge for the future well-being of the developing world, as the Earth may be home to 9.6 billion people by 2050. Total agricultural production will need to increase by at least 60 percent to match population and appetite trends, according to a 2012 projection by the Food and Agriculture Organization

The United Nations met ambitious goals set in 2000 of cutting extreme poverty — defined as earning less than \$1.25 per day — in half by 2015. The U.N. is drafting even bolder new challenges for itself to eliminate extreme poverty completely by 2030. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has inspired other tech giants, like Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, to become more active in philanthropy. The foundation hopes that more such charity will make 2030 a healthier, more prosperous time to live.

UN/AFRICA :

The Ebola Fight Has Reached a ‘Turning Point’ in West Africa, the WHO Says

TIME Staff/23012015

But the World Health Organization says vigilance is imperative to prevent reinfection in seemingly eradicated areas

The fight against Ebola has reached a “turning point,” according to the World Health Organization (WHO), as the three West African countries hit hardest by the deadly virus — Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone — see a precipitous drop in the number of new cases.

Liberia, which reported almost 9,000 cases since the deadly outbreak began in 2013, only detected eight new cases last week, reports the BBC. On some days, no new cases materialize at all, a heartening sign in a country where doctors once saw 509 new cases weekly at their peak.

“I would have identified the turning point as the beginning of the decline, first in Liberia and then later in Sierra Leone and Guinea,” Dr. Christopher Dye, the director of Ebola strategy for the WHO director general, told the BBC. “The incidence is pretty clearly going down in all three countries now.”

In Sierra Leone, where the health crisis once saw 748 cases flooding into hospitals each week, numbers are also stabilizing. The story is similar in Guinea, where the Ebola crisis reached a crescendo at 292 cases per week late last year.

Worldwide, Ebola has killed nearly 8,700 people and infected over 20,000 in one of the largest public health emergencies in recent memory.

Still, health officials at the WHO are exercising caution and warning that Ebola can reappear if risks are not properly mitigated. “Contact tracing,” or detecting everyone who ever came into contact with an Ebola-afflicted patient, is crucial to thwart future infection. Even one case cropping up can re-infect seemingly eradicated areas.

US/AFRICA :

Third Trial in 1998 U.S. Embassy Bombings in Africa Begins

By BENJAMIN WEISER/nytimes.com/JAN. 22, 2015

Fourteen years after four men were convicted in a trial stemming from the deadly 1998 bombings of two United States Embassies in East Africa, a third trial in that attack began in Manhattan on Thursday.

The defendant, Khaled al-Fawwaz, is one of the earliest and most senior alleged members of Al Qaeda to be tried in the United States. In an opening statement at the trial, a federal prosecutor, Nicholas J. Lewin, depicted Mr. Fawwaz as a loyal and trusted operative who had worked for Osama bin Laden in the 1990s when Al Qaeda was a small, tight-knit group.

He had run a Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan, and then helped to lead a terror cell in Nairobi, Kenya, Mr. Lewin said. Later, Mr. Fawwaz became “Bin Laden’s man in London,” pretending to live peacefully as a Saudi dissident but actually helping Al Qaeda “broadcast its message to the world,” Mr. Lewin told the jury.

He said that, Mr. Fawwaz helped to publicize Bin Laden’s 1998 fatwa stating that Muslims should kill Americans anywhere in the world, and he vetted journalists who wanted to interview Bin Laden, who was living in the mountains of Afghanistan.

“The defendant’s participation in Al Qaeda conspiracies to kill Americans and attack American buildings is simply overwhelming,” Mr. Lewin said.

Mr. Fawwaz’s lawyer, Bobbi C. Sternheim, did not deny that her client knew Bin Laden and had often met with him, depicting them as fellow Saudi exiles seeking to end corruption in their country.

“But what we emphatically dispute,” Ms. Sternheim said, “is the allegation that Khaled al-Fawwaz is a member of Al Qaeda, was in cahoots with members of Al Qaeda, to plan, to prosper and to in any way effect the heinous goals of Al Qaeda to commit violence.” She called her client an advocate of “peaceful reform.”

The nearly simultaneous attacks on the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killed 224 people. The four men convicted each received sentences of life imprisonment.

In 2010, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani was convicted of one count of conspiracy after prosecutors said he had assisted in the attack in Dar es Salaam.

Mr. Fawwaz’s trial is expected to last about five weeks, the judge, Lewis A. Kaplan of Federal District Court, has said. Mr. Fawwaz has pleaded not guilty to charges that include conspiracy to kill Americans, to destroy buildings and property of the United States, and to attack national defense utilities.

Arrested in 1998 in Britain, Mr. Fawwaz was sent in 2012 to Manhattan to face trial after a long extradition fight. He originally had two co-defendants: one, Nazih Abdul-Hamed al-Ruqai, 50, who had liver cancer, died this month; the other, Adel Abdul Bary, has pleaded guilty.

Edith L. Bartley, a woman who lost two family members in the Nairobi attack, said in a phone interview that the passage of time “doesn’t make it any easier.”

Her father, Julian L. Bartley Sr., was the consul general in Nairobi, and her brother, Julian L.

Bartley Jr., was a student working at the embassy as an intern.

“What I have comfort in,” Ms. Bartley said, “is knowing that we’re not dropping the ball. We’re still as a nation committed to trying to secure some justice for families of those whose lives were cut short.”

US scientists will soon test Ebola vaccines in West Africa

theweek.com/23012015

U.S. scientists will begin large-scale Ebola vaccine tests in West Africa within the next few weeks, officials announced Thursday.

The National Institutes of Health is launching a clinical trial of two different vaccines in partnership with the Liberian government, USA Today reports. In Sierra Leone, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researchers will test one vaccine.

NIH doctors will also test ZMapp, an experimental drug, in Liberia and the U.S.

Ebola has killed 8,668 people, out of 21,759 infected worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. Julie Kliegman

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

LYON. Sit-in ce samedi contre Boko Haram

23/01/2015/leprogres.fr

A 14 heures, ce samedi, ils s’allongeront sur la place des Terreaux (Lyon 1er) avec des pancartes pour dire « Stop aux massacres ! ». Un hommage aux victimes de Boko Haram, le groupe terroriste islamiste responsable de la mort de plus de 2 000 personnes, il y a quinze jours, au Nigeria.

Ce sit-in est organisé par le collectif « Africa 50 » qui regroupe quarante associations africaines du Rhône. Des bougies seront également allumées, peut-être en présence de Nigerians (*). Gaëlle Boz, secrétaire du collectif, souligne « l’importance de cette action » : « C’est dans la lignée de la marche républicaine du 11 janvier à Lyon. Il est difficile de mobiliser sur des causes africaines. Pourtant, le terrorisme nous concerne tous. Et il se développe de plus en plus en Afrique. On sait que Boko Haram menace les Etats voisins du Nigeria, dont le Tchad et le Cameroun ».

L’armée tchadienne a d’ailleurs rapatrié récemment ses bataillons maliens pour cette raison. Dans le

Rhône, personne n'a oublié qu'au printemps 2013, sept Français, dont la famille est pour partie originaire de Régnié-Durette, avaient été pris en otage par Boko Haram au Cameroun, avant d'être libérés sains et saufs.

(*) Il existe à Lyon une association nigériane. Nous ne sommes pas parvenus à joindre ses membres pour les faire témoigner sur Boko Haram...

87 migrants dans un canot pneumatique secourus au large de Malte

Le Monde.fr avec AFP/22.01.2015

L'armée maltaise a annoncé jeudi 22 janvier avoir secouru en mer quatre-vingt-sept migrants qui étaient à bord d'un canot pneumatique en provenance d'Afrique. Ces derniers leur auraient dit avoir jeté par dessus bord une vingtaine de leurs compagnons morts pendant le périple.

Ces clandestins, tous des hommes, qui ont déclaré être originaires du Burkina Faso, du Mali, de Guinée et de Côte d'Ivoire, ont été placés en quarantaine pour vingt et un jours, même si aucun ne présentait les symptômes de la maladie causée par le virus Ebola. Souffrant d'une importante déshydratation, trois des migrants ont été hospitalisés et l'un d'entre eux est mort à l'hôpital, a fait savoir la police. Des examens ont révélé qu'aucun n'avait été contaminé par le virus Ebola, a-t-elle ajouté.

Charles Mallia Azzopardi, responsable du service maltais de lutte contre Ebola, a expliqué à la presse que cette quarantaine avait été décidée en application du principe de précaution : un des migrants a en effet dit être originaire de Guinée, l'un des trois pays les plus touchés par l'épidémie, avec le Liberia et la Sierra Leone, également en Afrique de l'Ouest.

CHINA/AFRICA :

INDIA/AFRICA :

BRAZIL/AFRICA :

BRICS retain strong potential despite recent slowdown

January 23, 2015 /biznews.com

in Davos 2015

by WEFForumWorld Economic Forum

Ministers, industrialists and academics from the BRICS countries told participants at the 45th World Economic Forum Annual Meeting that all five countries' economies have great potential, especially if governments successfully implement planned structural reforms.

“We continue to invest in all these countries, because we invest not for the next two or three years, but for the next 10 or 15 years,” said Carlos Ghosn, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Renault-Nissan Alliance, France. Ghosn emphasized that despite the adjustments currently taking place in the BRICS countries, they are all capable of strong growth.

Justin Lin, Professor, National School of Development, Peking University, People’s Republic of China, said that China would have to depend less on exports and more on domestic consumption and investment, but the government’s strong balance sheet and high private savings will facilitate this transition. “I am confident that China will be able to maintain a 7% growth rate over the next five or even 10 years. China will continue to be an engine of world growth,” Lin said.

Arun Jaitley, Minister of Finance, Corporate Affairs and Information and Broadcasting of India, said India intended to return to an 8%-9% growth rate. Jaitley said the recent change in government has led to clarity about the path forward and a changed mindset, inside and outside the country. “The world is looking at India again,” he said. Lower oil prices are helping India’s current account balance and bringing down inflation, he added.

“Russia will have to learn how to live with more moderate oil prices,” Alexei Kudrin, Professor and Dean, School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Saint Petersburg State University, Russian Federation, told participants. Kudrin said lower prices were obliging Russia to make structural reforms and diversify its economy in a way that would benefit the country in the long term.

Marcelo Côrtes Neri, Minister of Strategic Affairs of Brazil, said Brazil is returning to the “middle path” it had originally begun in 2003: a combination of redistributive social programmes and market-friendly economic policy. He added that the country’s recent slow growth has not prevented impressive social achievements. “In Brazil inequality has fallen, and fallen sharply, since 2001,” he said.

South Africa too is taking concrete steps to rebalance its economy while maintaining strong social programmes, Nhlanhla Musa Nene, Minister of Finance of South Africa, said. Nene said the government is working to improve the environment for the private sector, to make the public sector more efficient, and to make the government more accountable to its citizens. Fiscal restraint is needed at present, but “we will continue to develop infrastructure and to protect the poor”.

The Co-Chairs of the Annual Meeting 2015 are: Hari S. Bhartia, Co-Chairman and Founder, Jubilant Bhartia Group, India; Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam International, United Kingdom; Katherine Garrett-Cox, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Investment Officer, Alliance Trust, United Kingdom; Young Global Leader Alumnus; Jim Yong Kim, President, The World Bank, Washington DC; Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman, Google, USA; and Roberto Egydio Setubal, Chief Executive Officer and Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors, Itaú Unibanco, Brazil.