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After 30 years, war on AIDS at 'moment of truth'

NAIROBI: With the war on AIDS nearing its 30th anniversary, the UN on yesterday declared 'a moment of truth' had come for new strategies to address the campaign's failures and brake costs that were now unsustainable.

"We have a unique opportunity to take stock of the progress and to critically and honestly assess the barriers that keep us shackled to a reality in which the epidemic continues to outpace the response," UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said in a report issued in Nairobi.

The 30th anniversary of AIDS is generally recognised as June 5. It marks the date in 1981 when US epidemiologists reported on mysterious cases of fatal pneumonia among young gays.

In 1983, French scientists pinned the cause on a new pathogen, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which destroyed the immune system in heterosexuals and homosexuals alike.

"AIDS has claimed more than 25 million lives and more than 60 million people have become infected with HIV," Ban said in his progress report on the disease.

"Each day, more than 7,000 people are newly infected with the virus, including 1,000 children.

No country has escaped the

devastation of this truly global epidemic."

Ban said there had been many pluses over the past three decades, notably getting AIDS drugs to more than six million badly-infected people in poor countries.

But at this point, "the HIV response faces a moment of truth," he said.

Among the problems he highlighted was "a wholly unsustainable" rise in costs and a flatlining in resources, which have remained at under US\$16 billion a year since late 2007.

More and more people are becoming infected, which means they will eventually join the numbers of patients who eventually need AIDS drugs, a treatment that has to be taken daily for the rest of one's life. — AFP



MOMENT OF TRUTH: UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon (left) chats with Kenya's Security Minister George Saitoti, after he arrived at Jomo Kenyatta International airport Nairobi. — AFP photo