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Record 34 mln living with HIV as treatment cuts deaths — UN

GENEVA: A significant expansion in access to treatment helped slash the number of AIDS-related deaths in 2010, bringing the number of people living with HIV to a record 34 million, the United Nations said yesterday.

"We are on the verge of a significant breakthrough in the AIDS response," said Michel Sidibe, executive director of UN AIDS.

"New HIV infections continue to fall and more people than ever are starting treatment," he noted.

About half of those eligible for treatment are now receiving it, with the most dramatic improvement in access seen in sub-Saharan Africa, which recorded a 20 per cent jump in people undergoing treatment between 2009 and 2010.

As a result of better access to healthcare, the number of AIDS-related deaths were also

falling, said UNAIDS, the UN agency spearheading the international campaign against the disease.

In 2010, 1.8 million deaths were linked to AIDS, down from a peak of 2.2 million last seen in 2006.

"An estimated 700,000 AIDS-related deaths were estimated to have been averted in 2010 alone," added the UN agency.

Not only is treatment helping to prevent new AIDS-related deaths but it is also contributing to a drop in new HIV infections.

Patients undergoing care were less likely to infect others, as prevention programmes coupled with treatments were proving effective.

Modelling data suggests that "the number of new HIV infections is 30 to 50 per cent lower now than it would have been in the absence of universal access to treatment for eligible people living with HIV." — AFP