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Zimbabwe Authorities Open Probe Into Market In Counterfeit AIDS Drugs

By Carole Gombakomba
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Zimbabwean authorities have launched an investigation into the alleged black market sale of counterfeit antiretroviral drugs to treat HIV/AIDS, state media said Monday.

The state-controlled Herald newspaper quoted Health Minister David Parirenyatwa as saying the Medicines Control Authority was "on the ground" investigating.

HIV/AIDS activists say such a probe is long overdue as sales of counterfeit drugs and expired pharmaceuticals have been going on for some time due to the intensifying economic crisis which has made obtaining legitimate AIDS drugs difficult.

Chairman Benjamin Mazhindu of the Zimbabwe National Network of People with AIDS said that because of the social stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, some people who have not tested positive for HIV but are experiencing symptoms that they suspect are AIDS-related are also in the marketplace for the illicit antiretroviral drugs.

Mazhindu said his organization is ready to help in the investigation, adding that the problem is even larger than the Harare government realizes.

He told reporter Carole Gombakomba of VOA's Studio 7 for Zimbabwe that that in some cases, registered non-governmental organizations purporting to help those living with HIV/AIDS, are selling ARVs whose date of expiry has passed.

Zimbabwe Medical Association President Paul Chimedza, who reported last year on the growth of the counterfeit drug market, said the presence in the market of fake ARVs and expired drugs is putting the lives of many in jeopardy.

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