

World is losing war against AIDS: Annan

BBC ONLINE

The world is losing the war against AIDS, United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan has warned.

In a BBC interview, Annan criticised political leadership in the developed as well as the developing world.

He urged people in the developing world to challenge their own governments and insist on their right to support.

Forty million people are infected with the HIV virus that may lead to AIDS - three million have already died of the disease this year alone.

Asked if he, as head of the UN, was winning the war against AIDS, Annan said: "I'm not winning the war because I don't think the leaders of the world are engaged enough."

Annan said it was unjust that AIDS was manageable in the rich world but a death sentence for people elsewhere.

He said the developed world - in particular the United States and the European Union - had failed to provide the resources needed to pay for anti-retroviral drugs, and set up prevention and testing programmes.

"I feel angry, I feel distressed, I feel helpless... to live in a world where we have the means, we have the resources, to be able to help all these patients - what is lacking is the political will."

He said many governments had described AIDS as a security problem, yet were not giving it the level of attention devoted to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

"For people in some of the countries we are talking about, AIDS is a real weapon of mass destruction - and what are we doing about that?"

"It does indicate a certain incredible callousness that one would not have expected in the 21st Century."

Long lost bird found alive in Fiji

AFP, Suva

A bird believed extinct for over a century has been found alive and warbling in Fiji, a bird group said here.

BirdLife Fiji researchers rediscovered the long-legged warbler (*Trichocichla rufa*), last seen in 1894, and managed to photograph it for the first time ever. They also recorded its "beautiful warbling songs".

The group said in a statement they found 12 pairs of the rare bird in Wabu Forest Reserve, near Mount Tomaniivi, which at 4,341 feet, is the highest point on the Pacific nation's main island Viti Levu.

The long-legged warbler is described as a "small, reddish-brown bird, named for its long legs and preference for dense undergrowth".

Another sub-species on the island of Vanua Levu, *Trichocichla rufa clunei*, was discovered in 1973 when two birds were seen, but the sub-species has not been found again.

"The sighting gives us new hope of finding the other rare endemic birds like the Red-throated Lorikeet and Barred-wing Rail," researcher Vilikesa



Masibalavu said.

Numbers of many of Fiji's birds have been severely reduced by mongoose, imported by the British from India.

"The long-legged warbler is a very secretive species but now that we know its song, we can find it and make our first assessment of its conservation needs," said Guy Dutson, BirdLife Project Manager in Fiji.

"They appear to need dense vegetation beside mountain streams. We are happy to conclude that they are surviving in some remote mountain forests.

Although currently safe at Wabu, they remain at risk from forest clearance and mongooses.



Former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury exchanges Eid greetings with the expatriate Bangladeshis in Bangkok after Eid prayers on Tuesday. He will return home today.

Billions to face water crisis as glaciers melt

AFP, Milan

Billions of people will face severe water shortages as glaciers around the world melt unless governments take urgent action to tackle global warming, the environmental group WWF said Thursday, ahead of a UN conference on climate change.

"Increasing global temperatures in the coming century will cause continued widespread melting of glaciers, which contain 70 percent of the world's fresh water reserves," it warned in a new study.

"An overall rise of temperature of four degrees Celsius before the end of the century would eliminate almost all of them," it said.

Average temperatures have risen between 0.6 and 0.7 degrees Celsius since 1860, according to WWF, which urged countries to curb emissions of carbon dioxide to ensure the increase stays well below a threshold of two degrees.

The Switzerland-based conservation group released its study on climate change and global glacier decline in Milan where more than 180 countries are due to gather from December 1-12 for the UN Climate Change Convention to assess progress in addressing problems concerning global warming.

"The melting of glaciers will lead to water shortages for billions of people, as well as sea levels rising and destroying coastal communities worldwide," WWF said.

Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, where major cities rely on glaciers as their main source of water during dry seasons, would be worst affected, it predicted.

In the Himalayas, there was a grave danger of flooding, the group said, noting that glacier-fed rivers in the region supply water to one third of the world's population.

"Glacial meltdown is a clear sign that we must act now to fight global warming and stop the melting," said Jennifer Morgan, director of WWF's climate change programme.

The environmental organisation

called on the ministers who will attend the Milan conference to act faster to combat global warming, urging those from developing nations in particular to demonstrate their will to tackle the issue.

WWF wants strong rules governing the use of forests, which play a vital role in absorbing carbon dioxide.

The group also asked governments to ensure Russia ratifies the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which establishes a set of goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Already ratified by 119 countries, the text just needs a commitment from Moscow to become international law, it said.

On Tuesday, Italian officials said the European Union has pledged 390 million dollars (325 million euros) a year to help developing countries from 2005 fight the damaging effects of climate change.

In 2001, 20 countries including the 15 EU members pledged to provide 410 million dollars annually to poorer countries until 2005.

UK launches crackdown on asylum seekers

AFP, London

Britain's Labour government patted itself on the back on Thursday for halving the country's influx of asylum seekers and announced new measures to dissuade potential immigrants.

"The statistics show that the number of applications has halved since October last year ... and record numbers of failed asylum seekers are now being removed at an average of 1,500 a month," the Home Office said in a statement.

Britain was Europe's prime destination for would-be refugees before Prime Minister Tony Blair's government vowed a year ago to halve the number of applicants by introducing tougher criteria for letting them in.

In October 2002, 8,700 people applied for asylum. By September 2003, monthly claims had dropped 52 percent to 4,225.

The government announced on Thursday it was tightening the screw still further, with a bill that penalises both traffickers and asylum seekers.

Labour said it would strip failed asylum seekers of state benefits, reduce their right of appeal and could even remove their children to coerce them into accepting repatriation.

"The policy is not designed to make families destitute and we do not

believe many, if any, people would put their children in this position," a Home Office spokesman told the media on Sunday.

The proposals have been condemned as draconian by refugee groups and shameful by the opposition Conservative party.

If the bill becomes law, human traffickers could be jailed for up to 14 years and asylum seekers found guilty of destroying their travel documents could spend up to two years in prison.

"Those claiming to be escaping death and torture must be honest with us. Those who cannot explain how they got here without travel documents should not expect to benefit from our protection," Home Secretary David Blunkett said in a statement.

The bill says that after May 2004, foreigners applying for asylum will only be entitled to legal advice if the British Legal Service Commission considers in advance that their claim is merited.

If their claim fails they will only be allowed one chance to appeal. If they refuse to let the government fly them home, their benefits will be axed and they will be forcibly deported.

The threat to take asylum seekers' children into care, which caused uproar when it was first revealed on Sunday, was not set out explicitly in the

Home Office's statement on Sunday. Observers said this omission appeared designed to ensure more support for the bill among Labour's own ranks.

But the government has confirmed the threat exists.

Blunkett sought to defend the measures in the left-wing Guardian newspaper on Thursday.

"We have to deal with failed asylum seekers who refuse to leave," he said.

"I have no desire to take children from parents and put them in care unless it is an absolute last resort... All we are saying is that if failed claimants continue to refuse our offer to fly them home and help them resettle, we cannot provide indefinite state benefits."

Currently parents who are refused refugee status continue to be supported by the state pending their deportation, which can take years. It is thought that up to 2,000 children could be affected by the clampdown.

The government said its asylum bill was aimed at "making the system work better for genuine refugees and encouraging the legal, managed migration which can make an enormous contribution to our economy and society".