

## **AU Experts Ask for Ban on Cannabis**

New Vision (Kampala)

NEWS

30 December 2007

Posted to the web 31 December 2007

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Kampala

HEALTH experts from the African Union (AU) have asked member states to ban the growing of cannabis, popularly known as marijuana.

They are worried that the cultivation of the drug, locally known as njaga/i>, was affecting agricultural production and posing serious food shortage on the continent.

It was also observed that cannabis users were at a higher risk of contracting HIV, among other sexually transmitted infections.

The concerns are contained in a 12-page document passed at the African Union conference of ministers for drug control and crime prevention, held in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, from December 3-7.

"African leaders should acknowledge the use of cannabis as a continental problem. Governments should get more involved in drug control through adoption and application of effective legislations and border control. Populations especially in the rural areas should stop cannabis production," the document reads in part.

Speaking to The New Vision recently, Dr. David Basangwa, who was one of the Ugandan delegates at the conference, said: "Some people are planting more acres of cannabis and less of food, because they think they will get more money. This leads to food insecurity, and that is why we feel that production of the drug should be stopped across nations."

On HIV, Basangwa, a drug control expert and senior psychiatrist at Butabika Hospital, explained that some people were injecting the drug into their skin, using unsterilised equipment. "Even in Uganda, it is happening, though it is a hidden activity," he said.

Basangwa, however, expressed concern that Uganda does not have a statutory body to oversee drug control. He also wondered why a bill on drug abuse had not been passed by Parliament, yet the laws in place are weak and archaic.

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