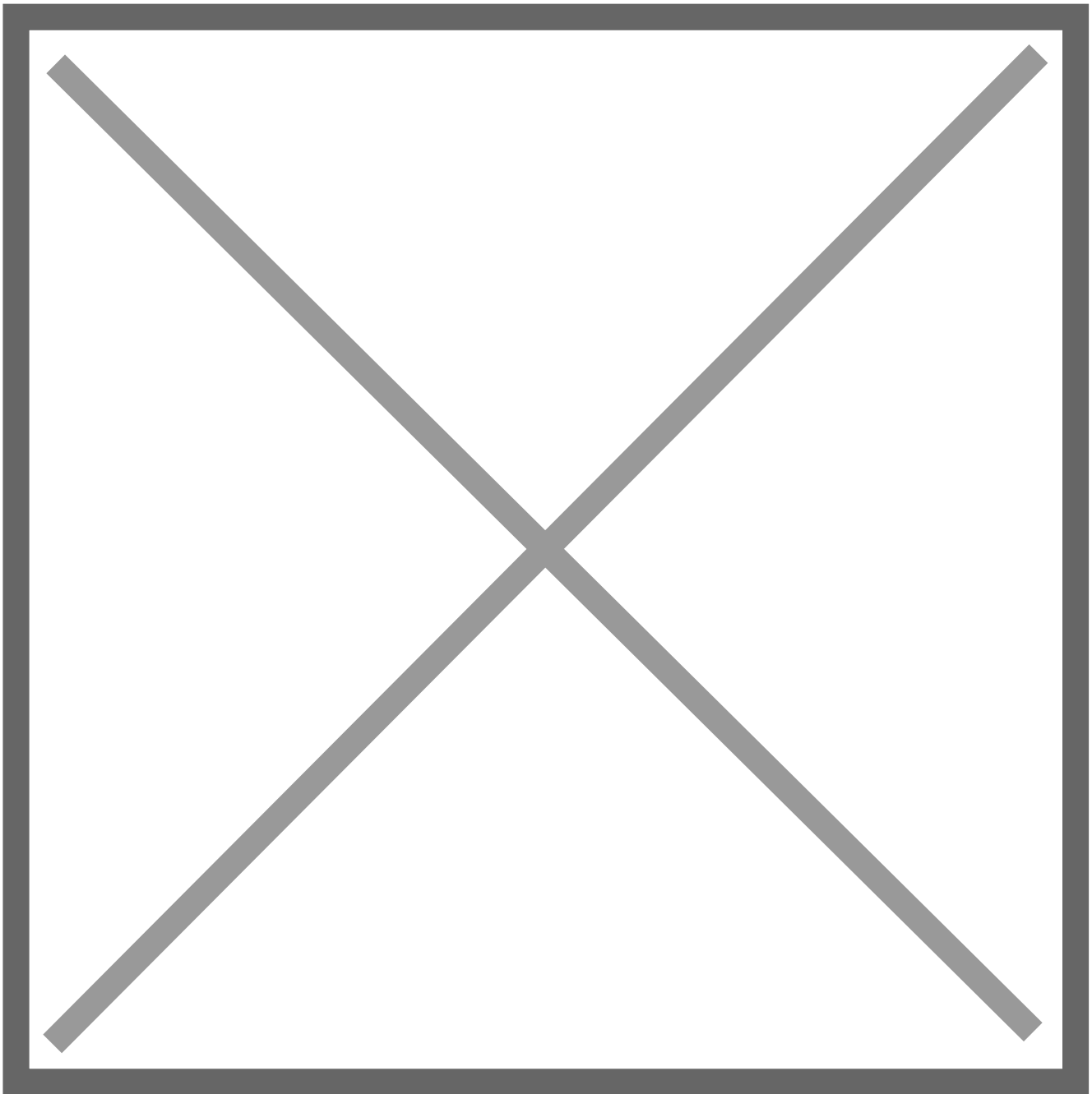




A health official conducts a rapid HIV test during the launch of Lenacapavir, a long-acting HIV prevention injection, in Epworth, Zimbabwe, Feb.19, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Philimon Bulawayo)

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Much has been done to mitigate rates of HIV and AIDS, but more work remains as children are still vulnerable to the virus and the disease it causes, said the Holy See's diplomatic representative to the United Nations in a July 10 address.

"The number of new HIV infections has declined in most regions since 2010, with the greatest decreases in sub-Saharan Africa," said Msgr. Marco Formica, the interim chargé d'affaires of the Vatican's permanent observer mission at the U.N.

Archbishop Gabriele Caccia served as the Vatican's U.N. permanent observer from 2019 until his March appointment as papal nuncio to the U.S.

Formica shared his thoughts during the U.N.'s 2026 high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, which had as its theme, "United to End AIDS."

Since 2001, the meeting has taken place every five years at the U.N. Secretariat, the multinational body's main administration, in New York.

According to its website, UNAIDS — the U.N. agency tasked with eradicating that disease and its underlying virus — serves "as the primary political mechanism for accountability and commitment in the global HIV response."

This year's high-level meeting was held June 22-23, with additional speakers scheduled on July 10, when Formica spoke, the Holy See U.N. Mission confirmed to OSV News.

In his address, Formica said that the Holy See "acknowledges the progress that has been accomplished in preventing and treating HIV and AIDS in the past five years," while also commending the "great strides made overall" since the inaugural high-level meeting in 2001.

Since 1995 — when an average of 3.5 million annually contracted the immunodeficiency virus — new HIV infections have been slashed by 65%, according to UNAIDS.

"Having access and adherence to antiretroviral treatment, people with HIV can live longer and lead healthier lives," said Formica.

However, as of 2025, there were close to 41 million living with HIV, with more than half (51%) women and girls, and 1.3 million of that total number children ages 14 and under, the agency states on its website.

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Formica described children as "particularly vulnerable to HIV," noting "gaps in both diagnosis and treatment."

Citing the U.N. Secretary-General's report to the conference, Formica said such gaps "mean that the 3% of HIV patients that are children account for 12% of deaths due to HIV."

The report itself stressed that "AIDS is not over," and that "the global HIV response is at a critical juncture" due to funding declines, debt burdens in affected nations, increasing humanitarian crises and "a regression in human rights."

Formica specifically noted a lack of testing and treatment for at-risk and HIV positive mothers, while urging "quality" care for women before, during and after pregnancy.

"It is vital to ensure early testing and consistent access to treatment for children with HIV in child-friendly formulations," he said.

"Multisectoral partnerships" have made care more available and affordable, yet "many are still excluded" from HIV and AIDS treatment, "mostly in the developing world," he lamented.

Formica called for enhancing healthcare systems and research in developing nations, quoting Pope Leo XIV's comments during a 2025 visit to a Lebanon hospital: "We cannot conceive of a society that races ahead at full speed clinging to the false myths of wellbeing, while at the same time ignoring so many situations of poverty and vulnerability."

Catholic healthcare institutions, which "provide approximately a quarter of all HIV-related care worldwide," will continue working to "ensure that all people living with HIV receive treatment and care in line with their inherent human dignity," said Formica.