The World Health Organization (WHO) has sounded an urgent warning about a global funding crisis threatening essential HIV programs in low- and middle-income countries. These programs, which provide life-saving antiretroviral therapy to over 30 million people, are now at risk due to an abrupt halt in financial support.

As of the end of 2023, nearly 40 million people were living with HIV worldwide. The WHO cautioned that a prolonged funding pause could reverse decades of progress, leading to a resurgence of infections and fatalities reminiscent of the 1980s and 1990s when millions succumbed to HIV.

For instance, Rwanda has secured $130 million from the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to sustain its national HIV response. This crucial funding supports access to antiretroviral medication, diagnostics, and community-based care for thousands of people living with HIV in the country.

PEPFAR, a cornerstone of global HIV efforts, operates in over 50 countries and has saved more than 26 million lives since its launch over 20 years ago. It currently provides treatment for over 20 million people globally, including 566,000 children under the age of 15.

WHO is urging the U.S. government to extend exemptions that will ensure the uninterrupted delivery of HIV treatment. The agency stressed that continued financial support is vital to prevent a major health crisis and protect vulnerable populations.

Despite these challenges, WHO reaffirmed its commitment to collaborating with PEPFAR, international partners, and national governments to maintain HIV care and prevent setbacks in the global fight against HIV/AIDS.