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Nobel peace laureate claims HIV deliberately created. 09/10/2004. ABC News Online

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Kenyan Wangari Maathai has become the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. (AFP)

Nobel peace laureate claims HIV deliberately created

Kenyan ecologist Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, today reiterated her claim that the AIDS virus was a deliberately created biological agent.

"Some say that AIDS came from the monkeys, and I doubt that because we have been living with monkeys (since) time immemorial, others say it was a curse from God, but I say it cannot be that.

"Us black people are dying more than any other people in this planet," Ms Maathai told a press conference in Nairobi a day after winning the prize for her work in human rights and reversing deforestation across Africa.

"It's true that there are some people who create agents to wipe out other people. If there were no such people, we could have not have invaded Iraq," she said.

"We invaded Iraq because we believed that Saddam Hussein had made, or was in the process of creating agents of biological warfare," said Ms Maathai.

"In fact it (the HIV virus) is created by a scientist for biological warfare," she added.

"Why has there been so much secrecy about AIDS? When you ask where did the virus come from, it raises a lot of flags. That makes me suspicious," Ms Maathai said.

Africa accounts for 25 million out of the estimated 38 million across the world infected with HIV, and the vast majority of infected Africans are women, according to UNAIDS estimates.

The United States on Friday congratulated Ms Maathai on winning the Nobel Peace Prize, but tempered its praise over her claims about AIDS.

"She said (HIV/AIDS) was invented as a bio-weapon in some laboratory in the West," a senior State Department official said.

"We don't agree with that."

The official pointed to a report of those comments published in August in Kenya's daily Standard newspaper, in which Ms Maathai was quoted as saying that HIV/AIDS was created by scientists for the purpose of mass extermination.

--AFP