'Miracle' mum-to-be in Sierra Leone tells of Ebola recovery joy

June 13 2014, by Rod Mac Johnson

A pregnant women identified as the first person to be cured of the deadly Ebola virus in Sierra Leone spoke Friday of her joy at her "miracle" recovery.

Victoria Yillah was discharged from hospital in the eastern city of Kenema on Sunday after hovering for weeks between life and death battling the tropical disease, which has killed more than 200 people since an outbreak in neighbouring Guinea.

"I am thankful to God to have survived the ordeal. I can hardly say more, I am overjoyed," she told the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation.

Health officials in Kenema, 320 kilmetres (200 miles) from the west African nation's capital, Freetown, say no other Sierra Leonean had been given the all-clear before Yillah's recovery, although three more unnamed survivors have since been announced.

"Victoria Yillah was among (46) people tested and confirmed as having the Ebola disease. She tested positive three times, three weeks ago," district medical officer Mohamed Vandi told the station.

Crowds gathered outside the broadcaster's headquarters in Kenema as Yillah was interviewed, with wellwishers chanting that she was the "miracle woman of the year".

"We are thankful that we didn't lose her. The family is grateful to God

and to all others that fought to save her life," her husband Saidu said.

Ebola can fell its victims within days, causing severe fever, muscle pain, weakness, vomiting and diarrhoea—and in some cases shutting down organs and causing unstoppable bleeding.

No medicine or vaccine exists for the disease, which is named after a small river in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Medical aid organisation Doctors Without Borders says the chances of surviving Ebola are greatly improved, however, if patients are kept hydrated and receive treatment for secondary infections.

Yillah has not revealed her age, or the date her baby is due, but is thought to be in her 30s.

A doctor at the hospital who asked not to be named said her survival was down to a combination of a strong immune system and excellent care.

Public gatherings banned

Sierra Leone raised its death toll from Ebola on Thursday to 17, announcing five new deaths over the previous 48 hours.

The health ministry said the country was dealing with 46 lab-confirmed and 76 suspect cases, most in the eastern district of Kailahun, where the first patient was identified on May 24.

The government effectively quarantined the entire district on Thursday, closing schools until further notice and ordering the medical screening of anyone arriving or leaving by road.

"All public gatherings and cultural activities are banned and cross-border

trade fairs halted until the Ebola virus is contained," a statement from the government said.

Sierra Leonean media reported on Monday that panicked health workers were abandoning their posts in the area.

Neighbouring Guinea has been struggling since the beginning of the year with the most severe strain of the virus, known as Zaire Ebola, which has had a fatality rate of up to 90 percent in past outbreaks, although the current rate is closer to 65 percent.

The World Health Organization said last week it had so far registered 328 confirmed or suspected cases of Ebola in Guinea, including 208 deaths, with 21 deaths registered between May 29 and June 1 alone.

The virus appears to have resurfaced in neighbouring Liberia, which earlier this year had seen 12 suspected and confirmed cases of Ebola, including nine deaths, but had not seen any new cases for nearly two months.

A person believed to have been infected in Kailahun came across the border and died in Foya, WHO said, pointing out that the dead body was taken back into Sierra Leone to be buried.

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