

DR Congo, Uganda Muslims banned from Mecca over Ebola epidemic

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Saudi Arabia has banned Muslims from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda from making the pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca this year because of cholera and Ebola epidemics in the region, a Congolese religious leader said Thursday.

"The Muslims living in DR Congo and even those in Uganda won't participate in the pilgrimage to Mecca this year," the head of DR Congo's Islamic community, Cheik Abdallah Mangala, told AFP.

He said he thought the Saudi government had "made the decision to avoid any contamination from the [Ebola](#) and cholera viruses," which have taken a heavy toll on the region in recent months.

Pilgrims have already begun to arrive in Saudi Arabia for the pilgrimage, the world's largest annual gathering, which peaks around October 25 this year with more than one million Muslims expected.

DR Congo has been battling an outbreak of cholera, a contagious [intestinal infection](#), for over a year, and of Ebola, one of the world's most virulent diseases, since mid-August.

According to the [World Health Organisation](#), which has not imposed any travel restrictions on the country, more than 20,000 people in DR Congo were infected with cholera in 2012, with a mortality rate of two percent.

Leodegar Bazira, the WHO official in DR Congo, said the organisation

had recorded 74 Ebola cases since August, 36 of them deadly, putting the mortality rate at 50 percent. But he added that the disease was now under control and confined to the northeastern town of Isiro.

In Uganda, Ebola has killed 17 people since July, but officials announced earlier this month that the disease had been brought under control and urged all countries to lift [travel restrictions](#) on Uganda.

To date, there is no treatment nor vaccine for Ebola, a rare haemorrhagic disease that kills between 25 percent and 90 percent of patients, depending on the strain of the virus. It is named after a small river in DR Congo.

Cholera, which is caused by ingestion of [contaminated food](#) or water, can strike swiftly, causing intense diarrhoea, vomiting and nausea that lead to severe dehydration.

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