

Gambia lifts flight bans as Guinea says Ebola spread slowed

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The Gambia has lifted a ban on flights from Liberia and Sierra Leone imposed at the peak of the Ebola virus outbreak as Guinea said the spread of the deadly virus had "slowed significantly".

The outbreak in Guinea is one of the deadliest in history, with 233 cases "clinically compatible" with Ebola virus disease reported, and 157 deaths since the start of the year, according to the World Health Organization.

"The general public is hereby informed that airlines serving Banjul and the sub-region can now pick up passengers in Liberia and Sierra Leone," said a statement issued by the Gambian transport ministry.

President Yahya Jammeh ordered airlines to cancel all flights from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone on April 10 in a bid to prevent the spread of the [deadly virus](#).

The new statement, dated Sunday, made no mention of Guinea, although it said further information would be provided in due course.

The spread of Ebola has "slowed significantly", with no new cases in Conakry since April 26, Guinea's health ministry said on Tuesday. The total number of laboratory-confirmed Ebola cases in Guinea is 133, including 83 deaths, it added.

"This is positive news for us. The restriction on the movement of people from Sierra Leone to the Gambia has nearly crippled my business," said

Isa Camara, a Sierra Leone businesswoman who buys textiles from the Gambia for sale in Freetown.

The Gambian government has not revealed how effective the ban was at keeping out travellers from Liberia and Sierra Leone.

"I travel from Freetown to Dakar by flight and from there, I travel by road to the Gambia," a Gambian who asked not to be named told AFP.

"Since Sierra Leone did not register any cases of Ebola, I don't think it was prudent to ask flights servicing the sub-region not to pick up passengers from Freetown to Banjul."

The Ebola outbreak across west Africa began in the impoverished country's southern forests, spreading to Conakry, a sprawling port city on the Atlantic coast and home to two million people.

Liberia has reported six lab-confirmed cases, six probable or suspected cases and 11 deaths, while Sierra Leone had two suspected cases of Ebola, both of which turned out to be Lassa fever.

The Gambia, a country of about 1.8 million, is a finger of territory flanking the Gambia River, with Senegal on either side and a narrow Atlantic coastline.

Jammeh, 48, is often pilloried for taking unilateral and seemingly impetuous decisions as well as for rights abuses and the muzzling of the press.

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