

Last Ebola-free region of Liberia falls to virus

August 23 2014, by Zoom Dosso With Selim Saheb Ettaba In Dakar

Every region of Liberia has now been hit by Ebola, officials said Friday, as the World Health Organization warned the fight against the worst-ever outbreak of the killer disease would take months.

After seeing people fall to the [deadly virus](#) in area after area, Liberia said two people had succumbed to the virus in Sinoe province, the last Ebola-free bastion in a country that has seen the biggest toll with 624 deaths.

The virus has spread relentlessly through Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, and Nigeria has also been affected despite showing some progress in fighting the epidemic, which has killed 1,427 people since March.

"(Sinoe) was the last area untouched by Ebola," George Williams, head of the Health Workers Association of Liberia, told AFP.

The country has witnessed chaotic scenes in recent days following a surge in the number of patients dying of the hemorrhagic fever.

Aid workers said crematoriums in the capital of Monrovia were struggling to deal with bodies arriving every day, and earlier this week, violence erupted in an Ebola quarantine zone in the capital after soldiers opened fire on protesting crowds.

In a bid to ease the crisis, medical charity Doctors Without Borders

(MSF) is working on nearly quadrupling the capacity of its Ebola centre in Monrovia.

"Currently we have around 60 patients for a capacity of 120 beds," said Henry Gray, an MSF coordinator.

"And we are making our site bigger. In the next 10 days, we hope to have a location that can welcome up to 400 patients."

In neighbouring Nigeria, officials said Friday that two more people had tested positive for Ebola, taking the total number of confirmed cases to 14, including five deaths.

Flare up

In a news conference in Monrovia, WHO Assistant Director-General Dr Keiji Fukuda on Friday warned efforts to combat the disease would take some time.

"This is not something to turn around overnight, it is not going to be easy; we expect several months of hard work. We expect several months really struggling with this outbreak," he said at a press conference alongside Dr David Nabarro.

Nabarro, a physician appointed by the United Nations last week to coordinate the global response to the worst-ever outbreak of the disease, was in Monrovia as part of a tour of the region.

Speaking to AFP, he said he was determined to "ensure that every piece of our apparatus is at its optimum so it could deal possibly with a flare-up if that's necessary".

Nabarro is also due to visit Freetown, Conakry and Abuja during the

trip, where he is tasked with revitalising the health sectors of affected countries.

No cure or vaccine is currently available for the deadly virus, which is spread by close contact with body fluids, meaning patients must be isolated.

However, two American missionaries who contracted Ebola while treating patients in Liberia made a full recovery in the United States. The two were treated with experimental drugs.

'They may die'

The failure of west African countries to bring the epidemic under control has worried its neighbours and nations further afield.

Senegal on Thursday closed its land border with Guinea, where 396 people have died to date, in an attempt to stop the epidemic reaching it.

Gabon, meanwhile, suspended flights and maritime links from affected countries, and said it would deliver visas to travellers coming from the Ebola zone "on a case-by-case basis".

In a further, urgent effort to contain the epidemic, Sierra Leone's parliament passed a law on Friday that imposes a jail term of up to two years for anyone concealing an Ebola-infected patient.

Ibrahim Bundu, a senior parliamentary figure, took the opportunity to blast some of the country's allies over their closures of land borders or flight suspensions.

"We are appalled by... the isolation imposed by those that we considered our best friends at a sub-regional, regional and global level," he said.

Meanwhile, as fears grow that the outbreak will spread across Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo—where Ebola was first identified in 1976 in what was then Zaire—said a fever of unidentified origin had killed 13 people in the country's northwest since August 11.

But a WHO official and MSF said Friday it was too soon to tell whether a haemorrhagic fever caused the deaths, and the results of swabs are due in a week's time.

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Citation: Last Ebola-free region of Liberia falls to virus (2014, August 23) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-ebola-free-region-liberia-falls-virus.html>

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