

Sierra Leone orders three-day shutdown to stall Ebola

September 7 2014, by Rod Mac Johnson

Sierra Leone said Saturday it will confine people to their homes in a nationwide three-day shutdown later this month aimed at containing the Ebola epidemic threatening west Africa.

Pedestrians and vehicles will be barred from the country's streets, except on essential business, for 72 hours starting from September 19.

"This will be strictly adhered to without exception," government spokesman Abdulai Bayratay told AFP by telephone as he announced the quarantine plan.

"We intend to ensure that the dreaded disease is checked."

The worst-ever outbreak of Ebola has claimed 491 lives in Sierra Leone, one of three countries at the epicentre of the epidemic which has so far killed more than 2,000.

Authorities in Freetown will use the three-day window to search out patients who have not come forward for treatment centres.

"Health workers as well as health-related NGO personnel will make house-to-house checks on homes for likely Ebola sufferers that relatives have hidden," he said.

Bayratay said several new ambulances and up to 30 military vehicles would be arriving to help enforce, and make use of, the shutdown, which

could be repeated if necessary.

A 7,000-strong patrol force including [health workers](#), civil society activists and community members is to be set up to organise the quarantine plan, said a statement from the presidency in Freetown.

"Their mission will be to monitor and track contacts, as well as to identify people with Ebola symptoms in order to prevent its transmission," the statement said.

"The decision was made to mobilise the entire population from September 18 to prepare for the confinement."

No vaccine or treatment

The Sierra Leone quarantine plan was announced after the World Health Organization (WHO) said Friday that the death toll from Ebola since the start of the year had topped 2,000.

The virus has so far claimed 2,097 lives out of 3,944 people infected in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, the UN health body said.

Nigeria has recorded another eight deaths out of 22 cases.

The Democratic Republic of Congo's Health Minister Felix Kabange Numbi said on Saturday his country's Ebola death toll had risen to 32, with an additional 59 likely or confirmed cases.

But Kabange said the outbreak in DRC—where Ebola was first discovered in 1976 near the river of the same name—"remains contained" in the dense jungle of the country's remote Equateur province, some 800 kilometres (500 miles) northwest of Kinshasa.

The UN's children agency announced on Friday it had used funds from the World Bank to airlift 48 tonnes of medicine and medical supplies, including latex gloves and other protective equipment, intravenous fluids and antibiotics, to treat patients in Sierra Leone.

No licenced vaccine or treatment exist for Ebola, a haemorrhagic fever caused by a virus transmitted through contact with infected body fluids.

The WHO has said it is hopeful a vaccine could be available for health workers to use by November.

Many governments have sought to isolate Sierra Leone as it battles the disease. Paris urged Air France last month to temporarily suspend direct flights to Freetown and British Airways has joined several African carriers in halting its services to the capital.

Saudi Arabia has also suspended providing work permits to nationals of Ebola-hit nations.

The outbreak has even affected sporting events, after Ivory Coast on Saturday refused entry to football players based in Sierra Leone hoping to play in an Africa Cup of Nations qualifier in Abidjan.

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