

International community ramps up Africa Ebola aid

October 27 2014, by Rodney Muhumuza



In this photo taken on Thursday, Oct. 23, 2014, a cargo plane is loaded with supplies to combat the spread of the Ebola virus in Accra, Ghana. Ghana, which is near the Ebola-hit countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea but has not itself been exposed to the disease, has become the main staging area and headquarters for the U.N. Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, or UNMEER. (AP Photo/Christian Thompson)

German Capt. Mattias Reichenbach has loaded protective gear, soap and other cargo onto his plane and is ready to take off from the United Nations' main staging area in Ghana during a crisis that has claimed

thousands of lives in three African countries.

Instead of serving as peacekeepers against insurgents in some bush war, though, the U.N. is battling a different type of deadly foe: Ebola.

Accra, the capital of Ghana, has become the main staging area and headquarters for the U.N. Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, or UNMEER. The establishment in September of what the U.N. describes as its first-ever emergency health mission comes as international efforts against Ebola, which has killed nearly 5,000 people in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea, are finally being stepped up.

The intervention teams must move quickly. The World Health Organization says there could be 10,000 new Ebola cases a week by December if the world doesn't get more heavily involved.

Cuba has sent 165 doctors to Sierra Leone, and 91 more doctors and nurses are now joining them. China has sent nearly 200 medical staff and humanitarian aid to West Africa.

The responses by the United States, Britain and France are largely based on historical or colonial ties. France has focused its efforts on Guinea; Britain on Sierra Leone; and the United States is giving much of its aid to Liberia.



In this photo taken on Thursday, Oct. 23, 2014, a forklift operator loads supplies onto a plane to help combat the spread of the Ebola virus in Accra, Ghana. Ghana, which is near the Ebola-hit countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea but has not itself been exposed to the disease, has become the main staging area and headquarters for the U.N. Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, or UNMEER. (AP Photo/Christian Thompson)

Among those efforts:

— Maj. Gen. Gary J. Volesky, commander of the 101st Airborne Division, assumed command in Liberia on Saturday of the growing contingent of U.S. forces in Liberia. "You need our support demonstrated with action not words, and action is exactly what we are going to provide," Volesky said. A 25-bed hospital for infected [health care workers](#) in Monrovia, Liberia's capital, should be fully operational in the first week of November. American doctors and nurses will staff it. About 600 U.S. service members are now in Liberia, according to the

U.S. Department of Defense. The U.S. has also set up Ebola testing labs in Liberia, which was established almost 200 years ago for former slaves from America.

—A British hospital and support vessel carrying 32 vehicles is sailing to Sierra Leone, where more than 300 U.K. military personnel are based. The Royal Navy's RFA Argus, which left the U.K. on Oct. 17, is expected soon in the capital, Freetown. Britain is also building treatment centers. One that will hold 92 beds is almost complete in Kerry Town, outside Freetown. In the national stadium, local and international health workers are being trained every week in how to treat Ebola and safely wear personal protection equipment.

—France is building three treatment centers in its former colony of Guinea, including one clinic in Macenta in the country's southeast that has seen a resurgence of the disease in recent months. All the centers are expected to soon be operational. France, like the other countries, is also building a clinic dedicated to treating health care workers who become infected with Ebola.

Samantha Power, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, said Sunday on a visit to Guinea: "We are in this with you for the long haul."

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said last week that the international response has been positive so far, but he stressed that a "massive surge in assistance" is still needed in protective equipment, mobile laboratories, vehicles, helicopters and trained medical personnel.

"They have asked for urgent help and the international community is answering the call with a totally unprecedented response," Ban said.

At a warehouse near Accra's Kotoka International Airport, the World Food Program has stored tons of supplies, from high energy biscuits to

blankets. Reichenbach, who flies a C-160 military plane, and the rest of the German team are tasked with getting them out as quickly as possible. Flights are made daily to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea by a pair of military transport planes.

UNMEER is preparing for a long effort to crush Ebola before the disease gets even more out of control.

"I don't know when the mission will come to an end ... Nobody knows," Reichenbach said.

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