

Obama, Red Cross see progress in Ebola battle

October 29 2014, by Zoom Dosso

US President Barack Obama and the Red Cross have offered hope that the battle against the deadly West African Ebola outbreak is being won, amid a dramatic drop in bodies collected in Liberia's capital.

Obama on Tuesday hailed progress in the fight against the disease, which has already killed almost 5,000 people, but said Washington would remain "vigilant," and stressed that science, not fear, should guide the response to the virus.

The Red Cross aid group announced that its workers were picking up little more than a third of the late September peak of more than 300 bodies a week in and around Monrovia—an indication, it said, that the outbreak was retreating.

The upbeat mood appeared at odds with the assessment of UN chief Ban Ki-moon, who warned at a crisis meeting in Ethiopia that the spread of the virus continued to outpace the response, while the head of the World Bank appealed for thousands more medics to join the fight.

The comments came a week after the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded that Ebola transmission "remains intense" in the capitals of Liberia and neighbouring Guinea and Sierra Leone.

WHO assistant director-general Bruce Aylward will on Wednesday give an update on the UN agency's response to the outbreak .

Obama said the disease "can be contained" and vowed: "It will be defeated."

Citing a phone conversation with members of a US team dispatched to help combat Ebola, Obama said "the good news is that it's starting to have an impact."

"They're starting to see some progress in Liberia, and the infrastructure is beginning to get built out," he said.

Fayah Tamba, head of the Liberian Red Cross, said his workers collected 117 bodies last week from Montserrado county, which includes Monrovia, noting a steady decline from the high of 315 from September 15 to 21.

"I am sure you don't need a rocket scientist to tell you that the cases are dropping," he told private radio station Sky FM.

Nearly all of the Ebola fatalities have been in West Africa. This has led to cancelled flights, border closures and a firestorm of criticism in the United States over the treatment of returning [health workers](#).

Another country in West Africa, Mali, is scrambling to prevent a full-blown outbreak after a two-year-old girl died from an Ebola infection following a 1,000-kilometre (600-mile) bus ride from Guinea.

'Global crisis'

Liberia has been hit worst, with 4,665 recorded cases of infection and 2,705 deaths, according to the WHO, relying on figures, however, that are now 10 days out-of-date.

Ban told reporters in Addis Ababa he was planning to visit Liberia and

its stricken neighbours at an "opportune" time. He urged the international community to send more medical teams to fight the epidemic.

"Transmission of the virus continues to outpace the response effort of the international community," he said after a meeting of the heads of the UN, African Union and the World Bank in the Ethiopian capital.

Ban, who on Monday had criticised the enforced quarantine in the United States of an American nurse who had returned from Sierra Leone, said the only way to stop the epidemic was "at its source".

World Bank chief Jim Yong Kim echoed the warning in an apparent swipe at developed countries that have not sent medical teams to the region, saying Ebola was "not an African crisis... it is a global crisis".

"We'll need a steady state of at least 5,000 health workers from outside the region... those health workers cannot work continuously—there needs to be a rotation," he told reporters.

Kim said medics should remember their vocation and their professional oath to save lives, and not shy away from going to a problem area.

Shortly after Kim's plea, France pledged 20 million euros (\$25.4 million) to fight Ebola, including opening several care centres in Guinea.

American solidarity

Ebola can fell its victims within days, causing severe fever and muscle pain, weakness, vomiting and diarrhoea. In many cases it shuts down organs and causes unstoppable bleeding.

The tropical virus is spread though close contact with the sweat, vomit,

blood or other bodily fluids of an infected person. No widely available medicine or vaccine exists.

Samantha Power, the US ambassador to the UN was due to visit the headquarters of the UN Mission on Ebola Emergency Response in Ghana's capital on Wednesday after touring the worst-hit nations in an attempt to garner global support for the Ebola response.

"My main message is that we will beat Ebola," Power said after meeting Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on Tuesday.

"America will work with Liberia to end the stigma on the country," she said. "We got our forces on the ground, we have our military and experts... to contain the virus."

In America meanwhile, a Texas nurse who was the second US healthcare worker infected with Ebola while caring for a deceased Liberian patient left hospital after being declared free of the virus.

© 2014 AFP

Citation: Obama, Red Cross see progress in Ebola battle (2014, October 29) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-10-obama-red-ebola.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.