

## WHO's next Africa chief is elected

November 5 2014, by Virgile Ahissou

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This undated handout photo issued by Save the Children UK on Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2014, shows prospective health care workers in the Kerry Town Ebola Treatment Centre being tested on their personal protection equipment procedure in Sierra Leone. The center in Kerry Town includes an 80-bed facility to be managed by Save The Children and a 12-bed unit, which will expand to 20 beds over the coming months, for health care workers and international staff who become infected by Ebola. (AP Photo, Louis Leeson/Save the Children UK)

As Ebola continues to burn its way through three West African countries, the World Health Organization on Wednesday elected its next

Africa director, a doctor from Botswana who is a longtime veteran of the U.N. agency.

WHO's next Africa director, Matshidiso Moeti, was the Africa deputy regional director until March. WHO announced the discovery in Guinea of the current Ebola outbreak on March 23. The circumstances of her departure from WHO were not immediately clear.

After the election results were announced in a WHO meeting in Benin, Moeti expressed optimism that the outbreak will be under control within three months. It has killed nearly 5,000 people and is by far the worst-ever outbreak of the dreaded disease, for which there is no cure.

"I hope that the (Ebola) situation will be improved by the time I take office in February 2015," Moeti told journalists. She said the [health](#) systems in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea have been devastated and would need to be rebuilt and that readiness for any future Ebola outbreak must be improved, including warning systems and monitoring capabilities.

In Sierra Leone, where the epidemic is currently particularly strong and where treatment centers are urgently needed, one built by Britain was finally opening outside the capital Wednesday. The center in Kerry Town includes an 80-bed facility to be managed by Save The Children and a 12-bed unit, which will expand to 20 beds over the coming months, for [health care workers](#) and international staff who become infected by Ebola. This smaller one will be staffed by British army medics.

"We are expecting the first patients today," said Helen Mayelle, a Save the Children spokeswoman. The center will gradually become fully operational over the coming weeks.

Representatives from WHO's 46 African member countries—usually members of health ministries—voted in a secret ballot for the regional director. Elections in U.N. organizations give member countries a say in who the leader is.



Botswana doctor Matshidiso Moeti, as she attends a World Health Organization meeting in the city of Cotonou, Benin, Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2014. As Ebola continued to burn its way through three West African countries, the World Health Organization on Wednesday elected its next Africa director, Botswana doctor Matshidiso Moeti, a longtime veteran of the U.N. agency. (AP Photo/Valentin Salako)

WHO Africa's outgoing leader, Angolan doctor Luis Sambo, was criticized for overseeing WHO's bungled response to the biggest Ebola outbreak in history.

In an internal draft document obtained by the Associated Press last month, WHO blamed its staff in Africa for initially botching the response to Ebola.

Dr. Donald A. Henderson, who ran WHO's smallpox eradication program in the 1970s, said WHO offices often lack accountability and that past elections were based on political trade-offs, not merit.

Moeti previously led the epidemiology department in Botswana's Health Ministry as well as its AIDS department and joined WHO Africa as a regional adviser for women's and adolescent health. She was previously head of WHO's Malawi office.

Aboubakar Sidiki Diakite, inspector general for Guinea's health ministry, welcomed the election as an opportunity for reform.

"A change always brings new impetus," he told the AP in Paris this week. He said the new director would find "weaknesses" in the system that need to be remedied and acknowledged Guinea had problems with resources and "didn't really realize what was going on" with Ebola early enough.



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Sierra Leone has seen a rapid increase in cases in and around the capital in recent weeks, and the country is desperately short on space to treat people. Britain's Department for International Development, which funded the Kerry Town center, says there are only 326 beds in Sierra

Leone. This is in a country that has routinely reported around 350 cases per week over the last several weeks. The key to stemming the outbreak is by isolating people who become infected. Ebola is transmitted through contact with bodily fluids.

The Kerry Town center, built of wood framing covered by white material, also hosts a laboratory run by British scientists. It is the first of six centers that Britain plans to build.



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Australia's prime minister said Wednesday that his government expects to staff a British-built Ebola hospital in Sierra Leone by the end of the month. Prime Minister Tony Abbott said Australia made the decision after Britain guaranteed it would treat any Australian health worker infected with Ebola.

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