

## **S.Leone nurses strike over Ebola hazard pay amid lockdown**

December 26 2014

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Nurses at a public hospital in northern Sierra Leone were on strike Thursday to demand hazard pay for treating Ebola patients, as the region was under lockdown in a bid by authorities to combat the killer virus.

Some 30 nurses at the Mabenteh Hospital in the town of Makeni said they had been refusing to work since Wednesday because of "the non payment of risk allowance" by the government for the month of November.

A spokesman for the nurses, Henry Conteh, told public radio: "We are not going to attend to any patients who are already admitted and will not accept any new cases until we are paid."

"The matter is serious and needs to be settled urgently," he said.

There was no immediate information available on how much money the health workers were owed or how many patients had been turned away.

The manager of the Mabenteh Hospital board, Ibrahim Bangura, said he was working "to resolve the issue with the authorities so that patients' lives will not be at risk."

The strike action came as Sierra Leone's northern region marked the second day of a five-day lockdown as part of intensified government efforts to contain the Ebola epidemic, with many public Christmas and New Year celebrations also banned.

Ebola has killed more than 7,500 people over the past year, almost all of them in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone recently overtook Liberia as the country with the highest number of infections, recording 9,004 cases and 2,582 deaths, the World Health Organization said in its most recent update.

Markets and shops were shut in the country's north on Thursday and travel between districts was strictly forbidden save for Ebola health workers and authorised personnel.

Except for Christmas Day mass, no public gatherings were allowed.

The resident minister for the Northern Region, Alie Kamara, told AFP that despite the many restrictions there was "much compliance" with the lockdown.

The Sierra Leonean government already imposed a nationwide shutdown for three days in September in a bid to halt the spread of the disease, when more than 28,000 volunteers went house-to-house to raise awareness about Ebola.

Anti-Ebola teams were out in force again on Thursday, going door-to-door in the west of the country, including in the capital Freetown, for a mass education campaign set to last until December 31.

Sierra's Leone's west "is now experiencing the most intense transmission" of all the affected countries, the WHO said this week.

"We want to hit zero cases soon and although we don't have a fixed date as to when Ebola will end, I think we can say by the first quarter of 2015," said Palo Conteh, head of the government's National Ebola Response Centre.

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