

# Guinea president still 'at war' against Ebola

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Guinean President Alpha Conde is "still at war" against Ebola despite declining cases in his small west African nation, he told AFP in an interview.

Conde was speaking to AFP on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum, which brings together 2,500 of the world's most influential business and political leaders.

In its latest update, the World Health Organization said that 8,688 people had died in the epidemic, among a cumulative total of 21,759 cases.

However, the latest data from the affected nations of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia are more reassuring, with the frequency of new cases clearly on the decline.

Liberia, which had a peak of over 300 new cases a week in August and September, had just five remaining cases, assistant health minister Tolbert Nyensuwah told AFP on Saturday.

Meanwhile in Guinea, there were only 20 confirmed cases last week against 45 the week before.

But this was no reason for complacency, the president said.

"It's precisely because things are getting better that we have to stay vigilant in order to get to zero cases," Conde said.

The WHO also believes that it is much too early to give up the fight, warning on Friday that the situation was still "extremely alarming" despite the significant fall in new cases.

"Our priority is to end Ebola, because everything stems from there," Conde said.

First on his mind was the Guinean economy, which has been ravaged by the effects of the Ebola epidemic.

"We have to see how to compensate for the damage that Ebola has inflicted on our economy and our finances," Conde said, adding that the International Monetary Fund should forgive the poor country's debt.

That call is backed by the United States, IMF's largest shareholder, which has urged the crisis lender to wipe out around a fifth of the \$480 million (\$557 million) owed it by the three Ebola-hit African nations.

"The consequences are extremely serious for our economy, business executives no longer come to our country," the leader said.

"To close mining deals, talks had to take place by video conference and schools only opened last Monday," he said.

Conde spoke to AFP at the Swiss ski resort just as the often tense political situation in Guinea was once again heating up.

Conde, a former rebel, defeated opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo to take the presidency in the country's first-ever democratic poll in 2010.

But this stoked deadly ethnic tensions that have dogged Guinean politics since independence.

On Thursday, thousands of opposition activists rallied in the Guinean capital demanding "anyone but Alpha" Conde be returned in presidential polls expected before the end of the year.

Conde declined to answer questions on the impending election or on whether he would again seek office.

"For the time being, I have a war to lead, the war against Ebola," he said.

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