

Ebola-hit nations pledge to eradicate virus in 60 days

February 15 2015

The leaders of the countries devastated by the west African Ebola outbreak vowed at a summit in Guinea on Sunday to eradicate the virus by mid-April.

The outbreak, which began 14 months ago, has killed more than 9,200 people in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia and savaged their economies and government finances.

Guinea's President Alpha Conde and his Liberian and Sierra Leone counterparts Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Ernest Bai Koroma made the pledge after day-long closed talks in the Guinean capital Conakry.

Hadja Saran Daraba Kaba, the secretary-general of the Mano River Union bloc grouping the [countries](#), said their presidents "commit to achieving zero Ebola infections within 60 days, effective today".

The summit came with infections having dropped rapidly across the countries, although the World Health Organization says Guinea and Sierra Leone remain a huge concern as both have seen a recent spike in new confirmed cases.

Reading a joint declaration from the leaders, Kaba said they "recognised the efforts that have been made by the member states and the international community which have resulted in the decline of Ebola infections and death rates".

The World Bank said in January the economic damage of the epidemic could run to \$6.2 billion, trimming an earlier estimate of \$25 billion.

However, the epidemic "will continue to cripple the economies of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone even as transmission rates in the three countries show significant signs of slowing," it said.

Worst case scenario 'far away'

The International Monetary Fund announced 10 days ago \$100 million in debt relief for the three countries and said it was preparing another \$160 million in concessional loans.

The leaders agreed to formulate a joint economic recovery plan to present at a conference on Ebola to be held by the European Union in Brussels on March 3, the Guinean presidency said in a statement.

"This comprehensive plan covers topics that affect virtually all key areas of development: education, agriculture, industry, trade, health and social action that will focus on the issue of the management of Ebola orphans and impoverished families," it added.

Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, the head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency response, said the dramatic drop in infections from the October peak showed that "the worst disaster scenario now seems far away".

"The number of new cases per week declined from an alarming level of nearly 1,000 in the bad times of the crisis to 145 confirmed cases in the course of the last week in the three countries," he said.

"However, despite the significant decrease of cases we must always remember that it all started with one case. We know how on the basis of

experiences in the fight against polio, for example, that it is easier to go from 100 to 10 than from 10 to 0."

In a sign of the fragility of the recovery, Sierra Leone was forced to place 700 homes in the capital under quarantine on Friday, less than a month after it had lifted all restrictions on movement.

The government said the properties had been locked down in Aberdeen, a fishing and tourist district of Freetown, after the death of a fisherman who tested positive for Ebola.

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