

Ebola-hit Sierra Leone announces disease control agency

February 10 2015

Sierra Leone announced Tuesday the launch of an infectious diseases prevention agency, saying it would convert its Ebola clinics into treatment and research units for some of the world's deadliest viruses.

The organisation will follow the model of the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the leading American public health institute which has been at the forefront of the response the west African Ebola outbreak.

Sierra Leone has seen more than 10,000 cases in the worst Ebola outbreak on record, but the epidemic has been retreating recently and ministers hope the virus can be eradicated within a few months.

Although some Ebola units are temporary, Sierra Leone and its neighbours Guinea and Liberia have been looking for ways to continue using others launched at great expense at the height of the epidemic.

"We are now on the verge of constructing a permanent Centres for Disease Control in Sierra Leone, and also the introduction of an ambulance service in the country," government spokesman Abdulai Bayraytay told an online news conference.

Bayraytay said Sierra Leone had "around ten" clinics, set up and run by the British and Chinese governments, the International Medical Corps and Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders).

"They will be there as part of our Centres for Disease Control so that, as part of any outbreak, which we don't hope for, at least we will have the capacity to respond to that."

\$900m lost to Ebola

Some charities have pointed out that many units are large and would be expensive to maintain, while others have warned that people may be afraid to go to a former Ebola treatment unit.

But Bayraytay said they could become an essential part of Sierra Leone's post-Ebola recovery plan, isolating, treating and researching Lassa fever and other haemorrhagic diseases as well as malaria.

Sierra Leone, already one of the world's poorest countries before the outbreak, has lost \$900 million in expected revenue since reporting its first Ebola case in May last year, Bayraytay said.

Information Minister Alpha Kanu had been expected to give the news conference, but was called away at the last minute as part of a delegation to meet Guinean President Alpha Conde.

Conde was in the country for a few hours as part of a whistlestop one-day Ebola "solidarity tour" which had seen him visit Liberian capital Monrovia earlier in the day.

The president held closed-door talks with Liberian counterpart Ellen Johnson Sirleaf after being greeted at Spriggs Payne Airport by dancing Guinean ex-pats waving banners.

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