

Ebola-hit countries call for \$8 bn for 'Marshall Plan'

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The three West African countries hit hardest by the Ebola epidemic called for an \$8 billion "Marshall Plan" on Friday to help rebuild their economies and boost prevention efforts.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf told global financial and aid leaders in Washington that the sum is admittedly high, but crucial to help Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone recover after the devastating epidemic last year.

She said the sum would allow the three countries, who with Ivory Coast form the Mano River Union development region, to reach a more sustainable growth level and build health systems that would prevent another such outbreak.

"Is this asking too much? We say no, because a strong Mano River Union can be a formidable force for recovery and resilience in the subregion," Sirleaf told a meeting, which included the heads of the United Nations, World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

Of the sum, \$4 billion would be deployed over two years to help restore communities devastated by the outbreak, which left more than 10,000 dead.

It would also aim to restore medium- and long-term confidence among investors, after many pulled out of the countries hit by the epidemic.

With new Ebola cases sharply down, but not entirely eradicated, leaders of the three nations said more money was needed urgently, even before a planned UN donor conference in July.

"The Marshall Plan was the consequence of a war. Ebola was like a war for our countries," said Guinea President Alpha Conde.

"We need these funds immediately, we don't want to wait until July."

At the meeting, World Bank President Jim Yong Kim announced a new \$650 million in funds for the three countries, in addition to \$1 billion committed last year to fight the outbreak.

Kim stressed even if new infections and deaths have declined dramatically, the three countries need support to ensure it does not return.

"The epidemic is not over. The world must not let up."

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