

Liberia closes US-built Ebola unit

April 30 2015

The United States decommissioned its treatment unit Thursday for Liberian healthcare workers infected with Ebola, with the country set to be declared free of the virus within two weeks.

Officers from the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps staged a parade at the Monrovia Medical Unit (MMU) as President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson urged Liberians to learn lessons from the worst outbreak of the virus in history.

"When our nation was in terror, people were running, running to nowhere, because they did not know what they were running from or where they were running to," said Sirleaf.

"People were dying not knowing what they were dying from. People could not touch their dead ones. Until now, when we hear an ambulance, we are afraid."

Liberia is one of three countries, together with Guinea and Sierra Leone, that were ravaged by an epidemic that has killed around 11,000 people since December 2013, more than 500 of them healthcare workers.

The west African nation is close to recovery, however, with May 9 earmarked as the day it will be declared "Ebola-free", 42 days after the last known case was buried.

Three Ebola treatment units closed this week, according the World Health Organization, leaving 13 clinics operational but empty.

"As we move closer each day to an Ebola-free Liberia, I hope everyone here today feels responsible for the success of the MMU," said Scott Giberson, west Africa commander for the corps, an elite uniformed public health service which operates across the world.

The clinic, which is actually 55 kilometres (35 miles) outside Monrovia at the international airport, treated 42 patients from nine nations, 18 of whom turned out to have Ebola.

Although the numbers appear relatively small, staff say the MMU gave doctors and nurses the confidence to treat Ebola in the knowledge that they would receive the best care should they fall ill.

Sirleaf said Liberia's health services had "collapsed" at the peak of the crisis because the country was unprepared for a major epidemic.

She called on Liberians to "learn a lesson of history" so that it would be prepared in the future.

The United States announced in February it was scaling down its 2,800-strong military force fighting Ebola in west Africa, leaving no more than 100 soldiers in the region by the end of April.

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