

## Alarm as Red Cross workers attacked in Congo Ebola efforts

October 4 2018, by Carley Petesch

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In this Friday, Aug. 10, 2018 file photo, a police officer stand guards at a newly established Ebola response center in Beni, Democratic Republic of Congo. The international community is sounding new alarm after three Red Cross workers were attacked while trying to contain the latest deadly Ebola outbreak in Congo. The U.N. Security Council seeks an immediate end to hostilities as it leaves for a Congo visit on Thursday, Oct. 4. Armed groups are active in the region and fearful residents have been aggressive toward health workers. (AP Photo/Al-hadji Kudra Maliro, file)

The international community is sounding new alarm after three Red Cross workers were attacked while trying to contain the latest deadly Ebola outbreak in Congo.

The U.N. Security Council seeks an immediate end to hostilities as it leaves for a Congo visit Thursday. Human Rights Watch urges an investigation into massacres that have killed well over 200 civilians this year in and around Beni, where health workers' Ebola efforts are based.

Two of the Red Cross workers were seriously wounded Tuesday when community members attacked them while they were carrying out safe Ebola burials in the northeastern city of Butembo, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

It was the most violent attack on Red Cross workers in this outbreak, the organization said in a statement. In September, a Red Cross volunteer was injured when people threw stones at a vehicle transporting a burial team.

"While we categorically denounce the attack on our colleagues, we understand the fear and frustration that many communities in North Kivu feel right now," said Dr. Fatoumata Nafu-Traore, IFRC regional director for Africa. "People are scared and there are many rumors circulating that only serve to heighten the sense of fear and distrust."

This is the first time this part of Congo has faced an outbreak of Ebola, which is spread via the body fluids of infected people, including the dead. Congo's health ministry says there have been 130 confirmed Ebola cases, including 74 deaths, since the outbreak was declared Aug. 1.

Safe burials are critical in stopping the spread of the disease, and the Red Cross said it has carried out 162 in North Kivu since the outbreak, Congo's tenth, began.

Insecurity is also a major challenge to health workers. Several armed groups roam the heavily populated region near Uganda, carrying out attacks and causing an estimated 1 million people to be displaced in North Kivu province alone.

The World Health Organization, which last week announced that the risk of Ebola's spread over Congo's border was "very high" after cases were confirmed near Uganda, now says the outbreak is at a "critical point." The WHO director-general, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, has expressed concern about the virus' spread into inaccessible "red zones" where armed groups have control.

Human Rights Watch on Thursday said more than 235 people have been killed in the Beni area this year in attacks with guns, axes or machetes. More than 165 others have been kidnapped. In the past four years more than 1,000 people have died.

"The brutal killings of Beni residents won't end until the commanders of the responsible forces are brought to justice," said Ida Sawyer, the group's deputy Africa director. "As Congolese authorities have not credibly investigated or prosecuted these atrocities, the International Criminal Court should investigate them for future trials."

Though many attacks have been blamed on Allied Democratic Forces rebels, Human Rights Watch said other armed groups and certain Congolese army officers might be involved.

Military operations launched in the region have been ineffective, the rights group said.

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