



Ebola Threatens Already Fragile Healthcare System in West Africa: Doctors of the World Responds in Three Countries

(PARIS, NEW YORK | September 30, 2014) *Due to the worsening situation with the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, Doctors of the World - Médecins du monde (MdM) is intensifying its activity in Liberia and Ivory Coast.*

The Ebola epidemic is continuing to spread and, in the three most affected countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea), the healthcare systems, which are already weak, are being overwhelmed. According to figures from the WHO, the number of cases (probable, confirmed and suspected) currently stands at 6,553, of which 3,083 have been fatal. With a total of 3,458 cases and 1,830 deaths¹, Liberia increasingly appears to be the epicentre of the outbreak.

“The healthcare system in Liberia is collapsing”, explained Pierre Sallah, MdM General Coordinator in Liberia. “185 health workers have already been infected. Some medical staff have left due to fear of the virus and many patients are avoiding the health centres for the same reason. As a result, other conditions which are still fatal (such as malaria and appendicitis) are no longer being treated and this is further exacerbating the medical situation.”

There is also a serious threat to neighbouring countries which are officially not yet affected, such as Ivory Coast.

Health and humanitarian actors are facing a dual challenge: to care and treat patients infected with the Ebola virus and to control and prevent the spread of the epidemic.

MdM has decided to focus its efforts on this second area of work: controlling and preventing the spread of Ebola. In order to halt the transmission of the virus, it is essential to provide training and information, based on participation by the affected communities. According to Pierre Sallah, *“We need to develop adapted tools and messages to explain the means of transmission and symptoms and the health protocols to follow, as well as how to respond to the rumours which are going round – otherwise the situation is just going to get worse.”*

MdM is therefore intensifying its activity at three levels:

- training 400 community health workers in prevention and awareness-raising among the population;
- training health workers to identify suspected cases and treat them with minimal risk; and
- supporting healthcare facilities (provision of medication and protective materials, such as gloves and masks).

MdM France is providing support to five health centres in Monrovia, Liberia, serving 600,000 people, and 125 in southwestern Ivory Coast (San Pedro, Sassandra, Guéyo and Soubré), serving 2 million residents.

MdM Spain is also providing a response to the epidemic in Sierra Leone by working together with the healthcare authorities in Koinadugu to increase their response capacity and to raise population awareness of preventative measures.

Press contact:

Miranda Sissons, Executive Director
miranda.sissons@doctorsoftheworld.org, 646-515-3712

¹ WHO data from 26 September.