

Ebola Cases Surpass 10,000 in West Africa While United States Politicians Impose Quarantines

Public outcry mounts in opposition to isolation and stigmatization

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World Health Organization (WHO) officials announced on Oct. 24 that the numbers of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) cases are now in excess of 10,000. Most victims came down with the disease in three West African states: Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia where approximately 4,900 people have died.

On Oct. 23, Mali announced that one case resulting in fatality had occurred in this country which is being occupied in the north by troops from France, Chad and other regional nations in a protracted battle against several rebel organizations. The victim was a two-year-old child which had been in neighboring Guinea-Conakry.

Markatche Daou, a spokesman for the Malian Ministry of Health, told the Agence France Press (AFP) that the girl had been in Guinea with her grandmother and had visited Kissidougou, a town in the southern part of the country where the Ebola outbreak was first documented in December 2013. 43 people including healthcare workers and others that are believed to have had contact with the child are now being monitored by Malian officials.

The death from EVD in Mali has prompted the WHO to send a task force team to the country. Three experts were immediately deployed and others are scheduled to follow.

Mali's long border with Guinea has remained open during the crisis which has burgeoned over the last seven months. Nonetheless, Mauritania has announced that it has closed its border with Mali in light of the one case.

Cases in Guinea Rise

Although the first case of the recent outbreak of EVD was traced to Guinea, the country has the least number of people who have suffered and died from the illness. However, reports indicate that there has been an increase in transmissions in recent weeks.

President Alpha Conde has requested that retired physicians return to their practice in order to address the sudden rise in the number of cases. Approximately 1,500 cases have been tracked in Guinea where over 900 have died.

The principle focus of the U.S. in West Africa has been in Liberia, a country that was established by Washington through the manumission and emigration of former enslaved Africans beginning in the 1820s. Liberia became a republic in 1847 but has remained under the domination of the U.S. since its inception.

Troops from the U.S. military have been deployed to Liberia to assist in the building of field hospitals and clinics but even President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has called for more support in an open letter published by the BBC during mid-October.

Sierra Leone, a former British colony, was created by London as an outpost where Africans who fought with the Royalists during the American Revolutionary War and therefore promised freedom, were settled beginning in the late 18th century. Britain has focused most of its assistance to Sierra Leone although the imperialist state has placed restrictions on flights and personnel to and from West Africa.

In regard to the situation in Guinea, a former French colony, there has been almost no help from Paris. Of the three countries, many expatriate Guineans say that the healthcare system is far worse there than in Sierra Leone and Liberia, both of which experienced civil wars that lasted more than a decade and just ended in 2003.

Guinea too has undergone military coups and rebellions over the last thirty years with the death of the country's first President Ahmed Sekou Toure in 1984. Despite the transformation from a state-controlled economy under Toure's Democratic Party (PDG) which was overthrown immediately after his death, genuine development has remained elusive.

Frankie Edozien wrote on Oct. 17 for Quartz that "Even though Guinea's bauxite exports ought to make it among the richest nations on the continent, it was lacking basic infrastructure. The major city seemed like a very small town in any other country in the region." (qz.com)

This same article continued noting "From Conakry to the Fouta Djallon mountains, France's colonial legacy was visible everywhere. Yet in 2014 the French government has not given the commitment that Britain has given to Sierra Leone in the Ebola fight. The healthcare system is still crumbling."

Healthcare Worker Speaks Out Against Forced Quarantine

A New Jersey nurse, Kaci Hickox, who works in epidemiology, traveled to Sierra Leone on behalf of the *Médecins sans Frontières* (Doctors Without Borders) to help treat patients suffering from EVD. Upon returning to the U.S. she was placed under quarantine although she had no symptoms of the dreaded disease.

Hickox expressed her indignation saying that she was treated like a criminal by the authorities in the state. She represents a continuous chorus of complaints by nurses who say that the U.S. healthcare system lacks medical protocols for dealing with EVD leading to two transmissions of the disease in Dallas as well as a general sense of panic, unnecessary isolation and stigmatization.

In a Reuters news article published on Oct. 26, it states that "Kaci Hickox, a nurse placed in 21-day quarantine in a New Jersey hospital after returning from treating Ebola patients in Sierra Leone, will contest her quarantine in court, her attorney said on Sunday (Oct. 26), arguing the order violates her constitutional rights. New Jersey and New York are imposing quarantines on anyone arriving with a high risk of having contracted Ebola in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, where the epidemic has killed nearly 5,000 people. Illinois and Florida said they were taking similar steps."

Nurse Hickox threatened to take legal action against the State of New Jersey saying the imposed isolation at a Newark hospital was inhumane. The nurse said that she was questioned for hours upon entry at Newark Liberty International airport and immediately ordered into isolation.

Forced isolation and confinement of Hickox at a Newark, New Jersey hospital raises constitutional and civil liberties issues, given that she remains asymptomatic and has not tested positive for Ebola, said her legal counsel Norman Siegel, a well-known civil liberties attorney.

"The policy is overly broad when applied to her," Siegel stressed.

The administration of President Barack Obama has spoken out against a travel ban from West African states although the government has instituted screening measures for people traveling from the most severely impacted nations. The White House also expressed its concern over policies implemented in New York and New Jersey.

Gov. Christie of New Jersey attempted to defend his state's policy over national television on Oct. 26. On the Fox News Sunday program, the Republican governor maintained that he was doing the right thing. "If anything else, the government's job is to protect the safety and health of our citizens," he said.

In the same state of New Jersey, in Maple Shade, two Rwandan children were withdrawn from school after a letter was sent to the parents of all students saying that the East African pupils would be monitored three times a day. Rwanda, which is in East Africa, several thousand miles away from any of the severely impacted states in the West of the continent, has not reported any cases in the latest EVD outbreak.

U.S. Racism, Anti-Worker Bias and Xenophobia Exposed

Only four cases of EVD have been documented in the U.S. recently. The death of Thomas Eric Duncan, a Liberian national, resulted from the negligence of the officials at the Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas where two nurses who provided care for Duncan, later contracted the disease.

Both Nurses Nina Pham and Amber Vinson have tested negative for EVD and been released from specialized treatment units at Emory University and the National Institute of Health.

Dr. Craig Spencer, a graduate of Wayne State University Medical School in Detroit, is the latest diagnosed case and he is being treated at Bellvue Hospital in New York City. Spencer was also a volunteer for Doctors Without Borders in Guinea.

The need for a rationale and humane response to EVD is seriously needed inside the U.S. Officials and media sources must be educated about the most recent outbreak of the disease and the nature of the transmission which requires exposure to bodily fluids from someone exhibiting symptoms.

In addition, the U.S. ruling class and state should provide maximum assistance and support to those countries where the disease has had a devastating impact. Attempts aimed at the isolation of the people from these West African states and those who are assisting them, will only further worsen the existing conditions in both the U.S. and internationally.

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