

# The Ebola Virus Outbreak: Contradictory Reports. Ebola Response Still Not Adequate?

Sierra Leone cases mount while France reasserts its imperialist role in West Africa

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*Despite the international media attention focused on the latest and most widespread Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak, there are contradictory reports on whether the three countries most severely impacted have met the goals for treatment set up by the World Health Organization (WHO) and other agencies.*

Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone have borne the brunt of the latest outbreak of EVD where varying statistical reports has placed the number of deaths between 5,900 and 7,000. Although it was announced over the weekend of Nov. 29-30 by the WHO that 6,928 fatalities were confirmed, this figure was later revised to 5,987 by Dec. 1.

Problems associated with data collection and tabulations are symptomatic of the response to the regional crisis. All three countries impacted most severely by EVD are seeking to overcome decades of political instability, civil war and military interventions which grew out of the fragility of the post-colonial transitional processes that extended imperialist rule indirectly through the role of transnational corporations and western industrialized capitalist states.

According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) correspondent in Sierra Leone, Mark Doyle,

“Whenever you read any Ebola statistic, take it with a bucket load of salt. The UN response mission and the World Health Organization base many of their stats on a hotchpotch of numbers from national health ministries, aid organizations and sketchy information their own officials can correlate.” (Dec. 1)

Doyle tended to think that the number of deaths is being underreported. He says:

“don’t expect the numbers to add up every time. Foreign aid workers and journalists want things to be neat. Around here they are not. We do know one thing for certain. The number of dead is definitely an underestimate.”

Nonetheless, the assistant director-general of the WHO’s Ebola response, Dr. Bruce Aylward, took a more positive view of the current situation. Aylward said of their figures that “We now believe that two of the three countries – Liberia and Guinea – are currently treating more than 70% of the reported cases and in Sierra Leone they’re probably achieving that in most

of the country.” (BBC, Dec. 1)

Dr. Aylward went on to say “In all three countries it’s clear now that more than 70% of the Ebola deaths that we know about are buried safely. And this is because in the past 60 days, the number of safe burial teams has more than doubled.”

The United Nations Ebola Response offices in Ghana continued to sound the alarm indicating that there needs to be increased focus on the eradication of all cases of EVD. Anthony Banbury, who directs the UN program in Accra said that “there is a huge risk to the world that Ebola will spread. That is why it is so important to get down to zero cases as quickly as possible,” Banbury told BBC News. (Time.com, Dec. 1)

The UN Mission headed by Banbury said during the last week in Nov. that it would not meet the objectives previously set for Dec. 1 in its campaign to stop the outbreak in the region.

### **Sierra Leone Facing Greater Challenges**

In Sierra Leone the situation is the most acute with breakdowns in response networks even though British and U.S. troops have a significant presence in the country. Despite the deployment of western foreign troops, relief efforts are coming under extreme criticism in Sierra Leone for announcing that a 100-bed hospital would be operational, while in fact, it will not be functional until early in 2015.

The facility being supervised by London through the charitable agency Save the Children along with the governmental Department for International Development has treated a total of 44 people with only 14 of its 80 beds being occupied. Located at Kerry Town, just one hour outside the capital of Freetown, the field hospital has been the focus of efforts by Britain to assist in providing treatment facilities available to people living in one of the epicenters of the outbreak.

The operation has been open for a month and is staffed by British, Cuban and Sierra Leonean physicians and other healthcare professionals. Administrators of the project from England say they lack the experience of groups such as Doctors Without Borders (MSF), a French-based organization, and therefore attributes the delays to this factor.

According to Charles Mambu, the director of the Health for All Coalition in Sierra Leone, “It’s very, very, very slow. Our only hope was in Kerry Town. Why isn’t it fully occupied? We are not happy with what’s happening here. We call on our former colonial masters - you have to do more.” (BBC, Nov. 30)

A recent article published by the Moscow-based RT worldwide satellite television news network says that “The facility includes a new blood testing laboratory. On site, there is a small separate clinic run by the UK Ministry of Defense to treat Sierra Leonean and international health workers if they become infected with Ebola.” (Nov. 5)

Rob MacGillivray, the country director for Save the Children said:

“We hope that offering a separate wing for staff treatment will restore the confidence of health workers previously reluctant to join the fight against Ebola - particularly when thousands of doctors, nurses and other medical staff are still desperately needed in the region to help save lives and prevent the

disease from gaining any more ground.”

## **French Leader Visits Senegal and Guinea**

Meanwhile French President Francois Hollande visited Senegal and Guinea on Nov. 28 seeking to deflect Paris’ critics who says that the former colonial government is far behind its allies in Liberia and Sierre Leone–the U.S. and Britain–in providing assistance to Conakry.

The fact that imperialism fosters underdevelopment and dependency in the states and regions it occupies does not mean that this policy has ceased under neo-colonialism. France has troops in many of its previous colonial territories and these military interventions have accelerated in recent years in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Gabon, Niger and other states.

Reuters press agency reported of Hollande’s visit that France “has agreed to set up a military hospital in the country to help fight the outbreak and has pledged 100 million euros (\$US125 million) in financial assistance for the Ebola effort.” (Nov. 28)

“France wants to set an example. Beyond material help, it is human help which is the most important.” Hollande stressed to media representatives that he had traveled to the region in order to “deliver a message of hope.”

## **The Fight Against Ebola is a Struggle to End Imperialism**

However, the impact of the most widespread EVD outbreak in history is clearly related to the legacy of western dominance over the internal affairs of Africa. Furthermore, due to the social dislocation caused by the disease, there is a burgeoning food deficit in the most affected states.

On Nov. 7 Granma International based in Havana reported that “The three countries most impacted by the epidemic are among the world’s poorest, and prices of agricultural products have sky-rocketed, since farmers and agricultural workers are abandoning the area. “ (PL)

This article goes on to say “While it is now necessary to direct international funds toward controlling and eradicating Ebola in West Africa, thought must be given to solving long-standing problems in the most affected countries.”

These problems cannot be solved under the current capitalist relations of production, trade and divisions of economic power. Africa must take control of its mineral resources and agricultural commodities so that the profits from the sales of these valuable assets will be utilized for the benefit of the majority of the people and not the transnational corporations and their agents within the global neo-colonial system of governance.

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