

Ebola declared a global menace

Geneva, Monday

NIGERIA became the latest country to declare a national emergency over the deadly Ebola virus on Friday, as the World Health Organisation called the epidemic that has claimed nearly 1,000 lives a global health crisis.

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan ordered the immediate release of 1.9 billion naira (\$11.7 million, 8.7 million euros) to fund the fight against the disease as Africa's most populous nation confirmed two more Ebola cases,

bringing the total number of infections to nine -- including two deaths.

The WHO appealed for international aid to help afflicted countries after a rare meeting of the UN health body's emergency committee, which urged screening of all people flying out of affected countries in west Africa.

It stopped short of calling for global travel restrictions, urging airlines to take strict precautions but to continue flying to the west African countries hit by the outbreak.

And it called on countries

around the globe to be prepared to "detect, investigate and manage" Ebola cases if they should arise.

WHO director-general Margaret Chan appealed for greater help for those worst hit by the "largest, most severe and most complex outbreak in the nearly four-decade history of this disease".

"I am declaring the current outbreak a public health emergency of international concern," Chan said, warning of the "serious and unusual nature of the outbreak and the potential for further interna-

tional spread".

States of emergency had already been declared in the hardest hit countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Nigeria became the latest on Friday.

The Ivory Coast, which neighbours Guinea and Liberia, said it was declaring a "very high" level of alert, while Benin is also investigating a suspect patient.

ArcelorMittal said it had halted work to expand its iron ore mines in Liberia after staff were evacuated due to concerns over the epidemic.