

'Ebola remains a daunting task'

Washington, Sunday

A US health official warned recently it would take at least three to six months to end the Ebola outbreak, which has killed nearly 1,000 in West Africa, and which has prompted a state of emergency in Liberia and Nigeria.

"It will be a long and hard fight," Director of the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Tom Frieden told a congressional hearing. The director on Wednesday activated the level of the agency's response to the outbreak to its highest alert status.

Calling it "a crisis" and "unprecedented," he said at the current trend there will be more cases in this outbreak than in all previous recognised outbreaks of Ebola put together.

The outbreak, by far the largest in the nearly 40-year history of the disease, has infected over 1,700 people and killed nearly 1,000 so far this year in Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Both Liberia and Nigeria declared a state of emergency on Wednesday over the Ebola outbreak. The state of emergency allows Liberia's government to curtail civil rights and deploy troops and police to impose quarantines on badly affected communities.

The health care system in Liberia was collapsing, with hospitals closing, medical workers fleeing and people dying of common diseases because they are afraid to seek treatment, Liberia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Augustine Kpehe Ngafuan was cited by the Reuters as saying.