

# Muslims face tough decision on Ebola threat, pilgrimage duty

**S**kepticism and most probably fear now engulfs this year's participation of fellow Muslims in the pilgrimage that takes place after the fasting month in Mecca and other sacred sites, including Medina, Arafa and other legendary spots in the rise of Islam.

There is a recent report from Saudi Arabia where one person who had just come into the country died of Ebola, a disease tormenting several countries in West Africa, and which is not strange in the Great Lakes zone, especially in Uganda and Congo DR.

Being a religious ritual tens of thousands of Muslims from across the world converge to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina to participate in the ultimate form of worship, which is the fifth pillar of Islam.

That means it is well beyond reasonable doubt that a marginal scare like having a single case of Ebola noticed in Saudi Arabia could affect travel plans by thousands of people in various countries.

But since Ebola needs merely air or skin exposure for contagion to take place, many are having second thoughts on what to do.

The greater problem is faced by religious authorities, here for instance the Mufti, Chief Sheikh Issa Shaaban Simba, who alerted the public on Friday that consultations were being held, to determine if the situation on the disease warrants a rethinking on travel plans.

Obviously if there were a number of cases reported among the pilgrims, many countries would issue instructions on avoiding the Hajj this year to become the tectonic plate for a global Ebola plague.

Ironically, if this was to happen, it would be interpreted as one of the signs of last days, now being discussed all over the place due to the appearance of Blood Moons, the huge Japanese earthquake also predicted, and a vast war engulfing Syria, apart from a vast war in Iraq around a regime that many considered to be a dictatorship ranged against a large part of Muslims in that country.

But religious authorities should not make any inadvertent errors in reading the medical part of the Hajj converging multitudes, despite that plenty does not depend on them but on other decision makers in countries affected by Ebola, and on Saudi authorities or keepers of the shrines, notably.

It is even possible that some religious edicts have at one place or another been issued on what conditions are permissible to stop people from performing the Hajj, where the issue becomes one of the public authorities and where it is an individual decision.

So far it can be said that it is an individual decision as several days have passed since the case of Ebola entrant into Saudia was reported, and no contagion, or another case, has come up.

Depending on the number of days remaining for any travel decisions to be made, things as they are do not militate against travelling to Mecca but religious and public authorities as a whole must keep their watch. As they say, a stitch in time saves ten.