

SADC health ministers resolve to join hands to fight against Ebola virus

JOHANNESBURG

THE Southern African Development Community (SADC) Health Ministers vowed on Wednesday to enhance cooperation against the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD).

The decision was made during an extra-ordinary regional health ministers meeting held in Johannesburg, which was necessitated by the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa in countries like Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Guinea.

The ministers agreed that no Ebola outbreak has been reported in the region, but measures should be put in place to deal with it in case of any diagnosed.

Malawi Minister of Health Jean Kalilani, who is also the chairperson of SADC Health Ministers meeting told media that they had already urged member states to accelerate the response to Ebola outbreak in the region upon deliberations.

"They also reaffirmed the need for high level national leadership by heads of state

and government in order to facilitate multi-sectorial response interventions required to cope with the epidemic," said Kalilani when addressing the media after the meeting.

The ministers recommended that member states to educate their citizens about Ebola across the different cultural, political and religious divide. They said educating the citizens about Ebola will prepare the community to respond well in case of an outbreak.

Kalilani also said member states were encouraged to "identify and commit additional domestic financial resources to support the outbreak preparedness."

"We agreed to organise cross-border consultations to facilitate exchange of information and agree on joint collaborative actions. Strengthen surveillance, case finding/detection, reporting and contact tracing and share information with EVD and World Health Organization (WHO)," added the chairperson.

They also agreed to identify healthy facilities to be used in case of an outbreak of Ebola and equip it with machinery based on WHO guidelines.

The ministers also committed to work with WHO on the latest statistics and information about Ebola, as well as request WHO to assist in cross-border collaboration

South Africa will be the regional centre to test and diagnose Ebola if it is suspected, according to their agreement.

South African Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi said the meeting was fruitful for them to put their hands together and share what different countries have been doing to combat the disease.

Motsoaledi emphasised the need for information dissemination, saying that "people from high transmission areas to SADC need to be screened. They complete the forms and the information is sent to us before they even arrive and we screen them."