

# West Africa seals off Ebola outbreak epicentre, launches \$100 million emergency plan

## CONAKRY

WEST Africa's Ebola-hit countries announced sealing off a cross-border zone on Friday and launched with the World Health Organization (WHO) a 100-million-U.S.-dollar response plan to battle the worst outbreak of Ebola.

The announcement came at an emergency summit in the Guinean capital to discuss the outbreak, which was out of control and has already killed 729 people in four African countries -- 339 in Guinea, 156 in Liberia, 233 in Sierra Leone and one in Nigeria.

The presidents of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire agreed to deploy security forces to isolate the frontier regions where 70 percent of the 1,323 cases have been detected.

The transportation of anyone showing signs of disease across border will be banned, and strict controls at international airports will be introduced to prevent the virus from spreading outside the region.

Meanwhile, the leaders also agreed to beef up efforts to protect local healthcare workers and encourage them to return to work. According to the plan, several hundred more medical staff will be deployed to battle the epidemic.

So far, more than 60 medical workers have lost their lives when struggling to cope with the highly infectious disease.

Ebola, for which no vaccine is available, causes severe muscular pain, fever, headaches and, in the worst cases, unstoppable bleeding.

At the summit, WHO Director-General Margaret Chan said the outbreak was by far the largest ever in the nearly four-decade history of this disease, warning if the

situation continues to deteriorate, the consequences can be catastrophic in terms of lost lives, but also severe socioeconomic disruption and a high risk of spreading to other countries.

The Liberian government has put the total number of Ebola cases at 352 with 95 confirmed by Thursday, and ordered a 30-day compulsory leave for nonessential government workers and closing all schools.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf warned ahead of the summit that the crisis was "nearing a catastrophe" and appealed for more doctors and supplies.

Sierra Leone has declared a state of emergency, called in troops to isolate Ebola victims and canceled foreign trips by ministers.

Nigeria was intensifying surveillance to curtail possible spread of Ebola virus after the death of a 40-year-old Liberian, Patrick Sawyer, on July 25 in Lagos, the nation's commercial hub.

The United States, Germany, Italy and France have issued warnings against traveling to West African countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

U.S. President Barack Obama said Friday that his country will screen African delegates for symptoms of Ebola at the first U.S.-Africa summit scheduled to take place in Washington next week.

In the coming days, the United States will evacuate two citizens who have been infected by the Ebola virus in West Africa by a non-commercial aircraft.

In Britain, Sierra Leone cyclist Moses Sesay was quarantined and tested for Ebola at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, before being given the all-clear.