

Special Statement
By
President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
On the Ebola Situation in the Country

Wednesday, July 30, 2014

(As Delivered)

My fellow citizens:

Today, in continuation of our efforts to combat the deadly Ebola virus, I am pleased to launch the National Action Plan presented by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in partnership with the World Health Organization. Given the multi-dimensional efforts, including local, regional and international which we must bring to this fight against this scourge, the National Action Plan as presented is by no means exhaustive. However, it establishes a useful framework by which we can continue our work, as well as seek international support and assistance, as we invite the inclusions of other important aspects to the plan.

As such, the Government of Liberia is today contributing the amount of US\$5 million as our initial contribution to begin the immediate implementation of this plan.

Obviously, this dreadful virus has overtaken our public health facilities and capabilities. The nature of the virus and its rapid spread throughout Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, attacking, as it has, the way of life of the people of the Mano River Basin, have posed national, regional and international threats to public health and safety of the gravest proportions. This is unprecedented. The World Health Organization has upgraded the outbreak to Grade 3 Emergency the highest in its response category.

Already, working through a National Task Force on Ebola which I co-chair, and after wide-ranging consultations with citizens, health authorities and partners, we have announced a number of stringent preventive measures, issued standing orders to our security forces, and restricted movements internally and externally. We will continue to do more as the situation requires.

However, as we continue to see, this is not only a Liberia problem. It also cannot be seen only as a problem of the Mano River sub-region. It truly is an international problem with which we must all be seized and engaged. This is why, here in Liberia, we are especially grateful to the Medecins Sans Frontiers, and their partner, the Samaritan Purse who, at great personal risks, has continued to assist us in the difficult fight against this pandemic. We are also thankful for the assistance provided by the Center for Disease Control and the National Institute of Health of the United States for the much needed technical support.

The deadly Ebola virus is ravishing our country – claiming the lives of many of our countrymen with rapid spread in populated counties including Montserrado and Lofa.

Many others are under observation and surveillance which, according to the experts, could lead to more deaths.

Our immediate strategy is to contain the spread, care for the afflicted with the goal of “No New Cases”. And so, today, we announce the following additional measures:

All non-essential staff, to be determined by the Minister or Head of Agency, are to be placed on a 30-day compulsory leave.

Friday, August 1, is declared a non-working day and is to be used for the disinfection and chlorination of all public facilities.

All borders that are to remain opened are to be directly supervised and controlled by the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization whose duties it shall be, working with the assigned health authorities, to ensure strict adherence to announced preventive measures including preliminary testing for fever.

Without exceptions, all schools are ordered closed pending further directive from the Ministry of Education.

All markets at border areas including Foya, Bo Waterside, and Ganta are hereby ordered closed until further notice.

As previously directed, video clubs and entertainment centers must have improved sanitation including facilities for the washing of hands prior to entering and exiting as well as to restrict opening hours, and the number of individuals permitted to enter those facilities.

All citizens are seriously advised to avoid public amusement and entertainment centers.

Increase in prices of sanitation commodities used in this fight will be treated as an offense against the people of Liberia. The Ministry of Commerce is directed to enforce this order. All such commodities including chlorine, soap, sanitizers, fliers and buckets are to be imported duty free.

Several communities are being considered to be quarantined based upon recommendations from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and other relevant authorities. When these measures are instituted, only health care workers will be permitted to move in and out of those areas. Food and other medical support will be provided to those communities and affected individuals.

The Ministry of Health and relevant agencies are also to consider the cremation of all victims of the deadly Ebola virus. This measure is intended to avoid tampering with the dead and contaminating water sources.

Government travels will be seriously restricted and limited to only those that are determined to be absolutely necessary and critical. The Vice President and a few cabinet ministers whose presence are absolutely necessary will attend the ensuing U.S./Africa Leadership Summit.

The security forces, under the directive of the Ministers of Justice and National Defense, are again ordered to enforce all of these measures announced by the National Task Force on Ebola.

Finally, my fellow Liberians, Ebola is real. Ebola is contagious. And Ebola kills. All of us must all take extra measures announced by the Ministry of Health to keep ourselves safe. The government will do its part. But you must do yours. Denying that the disease exists is not doing your part to keep yourself and your loved ones safe. Hiding sick persons is not doing your part to keep yourself and your loved ones safe. Ignoring the signs and not reporting it to the health care authorities are not the ways by which we keep ourselves safe.

The sooner we unite in fighting this disease, as I know we can, where each of us will play our part, the sooner we will overcome this disease and return ourselves to how we have always lived.

Our appreciation goes to all of those who continue to work collectively as we try to fight this deadly disease.

May God continue to bless us all.