



## JOINT MEDIA RELEASE: AFRICAN UNION AND DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SOUTH AFRICA

### **23 South African health workers to be deployed to treat Ebola in Sierra Leone under ASEOWA**



**Johannesburg, 12 February 2015:** The African Union Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA), in collaboration with the South African government, is sending 23 South African health workers to Ebola affected countries. The health workers, including 20 nurses, and three paramedics are expected to depart Johannesburg for Sierra Leone on Friday, 20 February 2015.

From 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> February, the health workers underwent 2 days of pre deployment training given by the African Union and Ministry of Health officials. On arrival in the affected countries, the health workers will undergo further intensive training for 2 weeks before embarking on their duties.

African Union Commissioner of Social Affairs, Dr Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko commended the South African government for sending health workers, saying that the 835 African medical personnel so far deployed by ASEOWA have impacted positively in reducing both new infections and deaths from Ebola.

“We are very proud that, together with the governments of AU member states, we are finding solutions to African challenges by Africans. By representing South Africa on the mission, you will also be representing the African Union and Africa in general. I am very sure that you will acquit yourselves very well and continue to make a positive impact.”

This deployment is the second for South Africa, following an independent deployment on January 23. The first group is stationed at the Goderich Emergency Ebola Treatment Centre on the outskirts of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Since their arrival, the South Africans have already seen six discharges and lost two patients. One 36 year old man was a typical patient. He arrived with a confirmed Ebola diagnosis. He began treatment and then “crashed” as often happens, but treatment was successful. He recovered and was released, walking out on his own. The youngest patient so far has been a four year old boy. He has been moved from the ICU and is now recovering.

The healthcare professionals stay in country for 6 months of service in AU supported treatment sites and when they return to South Africa they will undergo three weeks of observation before they can resume normal duties.

According to Health Minister Aaron Motsoaledi, “Whilst thankfully Ebola cases are decreasing, the South African effort implemented by Right to Care and supported by South African business and the African Union are able to address Ebola ‘fatigue’. South Africa’s involvement which began last year



has been extensive and has included mobilising both a domestic response to prevent the entry of Ebola into South Africa as well as an external health and humanitarian assistance programme to support affected countries. The Department of Health mobilised cash and in-kind contributions amounting to almost R60 million. This has included setting up a NICD diagnostic laboratory which has tested more than 6000 specimens of those suspected of Ebola infection. The laboratory teams rotate every 5 weeks and are also training local personnel. We have also provided 16 000 protection suits and we have sent ambulances, scooters, drugs, generators, autoclaves for sterilisation and food.

Minister Motsoaledi concluded “South Africa can be very proud of our courageous health care workers and all those that have supported the Ebola response, as they assist fellow Africans to win the fight against Ebola.”

According to Prof Ian Sanne of Right to Care, “Team South Africa are on duty for long shifts each day; some of the time in full protective clothing and other times working in the lab or fulfilling other duties. They are learning to treat a highly infectious disease effectively. The knowledge they gain will be useful in knowing how to better treat other crisis outbreaks.”

African Union Director of Social Affairs, Dr Olawale Maiyegun summarised the ASEOWA intervention as follows: “the most important and effective intervention with significant impact is the decreasing cases. ASEOWA has made a huge difference. Before their intervention, Ebola was chasing us, thanks to ASEOWA, we are now chasing Ebola. It is just a matter of time, Ebola shall be defeated.”

As part of its obligations to the health workers, ASEOWA will provide the medical professionals with an allowance, full training, insurance and housing and will take care of them should they contract Ebola. FirstRand Bank (FNB) has committed to paying for transport, flights and transfers for this medical intervention.

There are four partners working on South Africa’s response to Ebola under the leadership of the Department of Health. They are Right to Care which has an MoU with the Ministry of Health in Sierra Leone, the Wits Health Consortium which is overseeing and managing funds from the private sector on behalf of the Department of Health and the NICD which has set up labs in Sierra Leone, is providing training and has a number of staff there.

The current deployment is being undertaken under the African Union’s Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA). The African Union will maintain the health workers on the ground till the countries are declared Ebola free. ENDS

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