



African Union

Support to EBOLA outbreak in West Africa

ASEOWA

May 16, 2015

Liberia Ebola victory – Testimony of power of African solidarity in solving problems

The African Union Commission has sponsored a media trip to the Ebola affected countries to document and publicise the African Union's intervention in the Ebola epidemic. Here, Joseph Ngwawi, one of the travelling journalists, reports on the first day of the trip in Monrovia, Liberia

Arriving at Monrovia International Airport, everyone was a bit apprehensive – rightly so after many harrowing stories about the devastation caused by the deadly Ebola Virus Disease in the West African country and some of its neighbours since last year.

As the team of journalists assembled by the African Union Commission to visit Ebola-hit West African countries touched down at the airport, one of the reporters asked what he should do in the event that someone tried to shake hands.

“It's perfectly safe now to shake hands in Liberia. The worst is over,” reassured one of the medical staff of the African Union Support to Ebola Outbreak in West Africa (ASEOWA).

At the height of the epidemic, shaking of hands – often considered a form of bonding in most African societies – had become a taboo in Liberia and other West African countries.

Most basic services such as health facilities and schools had closed. People avoided contact with one another for fear of contracting the disease.

However, life is slowly returning to normal in Liberia.

As the team of journalists was to learn later, it was not plain sailing and a lot of hard work involving a game-changing continental collaborative effort and unparalleled dedication and selflessness by a group of health experts from across Africa and other parts of the world.

“ASEOWA never regretted a day while working in Liberia but that is not to say the work was not without stress,” admitted ASEOWA Head of Mission Julius Oketta.

More than 10,500 people had succumbed to the disease between March 2014 and 1 April 2015.

Oketta however applauded the political leadership provided by President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson as well as the African Union, development partners and the Liberian people in ensuring that Ebola was eradicated from the country.

Liberia was declared Ebola-free by the World Health Organisation on May 9 after it passed the 42-day threshold with no new cases of the disease being reported.

However, the threat remained as neighbours Guinea and Sierra Leone continued to report cases of the disease, with seven and two confirmed cases of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) recorded during the week ending May 10, respectively.

According to ASEOWA and Liberian government officials, the major success factors for Liberia's victory against the EVD included effective case management involving early identification of affected individuals, surveillance of cross-border transmission as well as the active involvement and participation of communities.



The ASEOWA media team is met at the airport in Monrovia by ASEOWA leadership and some health workers

This was the first time we saw the African Union Commission and African governments joining forces to collectively fight a disease.

Several AU member states have deployed health workers to Liberia and other affected countries

“This was the first time we found Africa finding an African solution to fight an African problem in the nature of a health crisis,” observed Liberian Assistant Minister of Health Tolbert Nyenswah.

He called on African countries to remain resolute in their quest to eradicate Ebola and pleaded with the international community to resume relations with Liberia.

“We are just like any of you,” he said.

AU Commission Deputy Head of Communication and Information Division Wynne Musabayana said the media visit to Liberia and the other Ebola-affected countries was meant to raise awareness about the power of African collaboration in resolving the continent's problems.

From Liberia, the media team is expected to visit Guinea and Sierra Leone. © APA

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