



# African Union

Support to EBOLA outbreak in West Africa

ASEOWA

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## Liberia urges fast-tracking of proposed African Centre for Disease Control



A billboard in Liberia celebrates the end of Ebola

Story By Joseph Ngwawi in Monrovia

The Liberian government has called for the fast-tracking of the establishment of an African Centre for Disease Control (ACDC) to deal with future outbreaks of epidemics on the continent.

Addressing ASEOWA and local journalists in the Liberian capital Monrovia on 16th May, Liberian Assistant Health Minister Tolbert Nyenswah applauded the solidarity shown by the African Union to support his country's response to the Ebola epidemic that hit the West African country last year.

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.

The announcement prompted national celebrations, with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf proclaiming the following Monday – May 11 – a public holiday to allow workers and students to join in the festivities held in Monrovia.

However as Liberians celebrated the end to the epidemic, neighbours Guinea and Sierra Leone continued to report cases of the disease, seven and two confirmed cases, respectively, for the week ending on May 10.

Although this is a dramatic drop from the peak at the end of 2014, continued support and implementation of lessons learned throughout the crisis is required to bring the number of new cases in these two countries to zero and to prevent future outbreaks.

Nyenswah noted that the fact that Liberia has succeeded in eradicating Ebola cases while its neighbours Guinea and Sierra Leone continued to record cases was good enough reason for the region – and the AU – to remain vigilant.

“There is need to establish an African Centre for Disease Control so that as a continent we are well prepared to respond effectively to emergencies in the context of the global health agenda,” Nyenswah said.

Plans for the ACDC, a pan-African public-health agency, got a major boost in April when United States Secretary of State John Kerry and AU Commission chairperson Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma announced that the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would provide the ACDC with technical expertise and advice.

The 54-member AU has had plans to create the ACDC since 2013 and the Ebola epidemic in West Africa marked the "turning point" that prompted the AU to fast-track the centre.

It would coordinate research throughout Africa on the biggest public-health threats, including diseases such as Ebola and meningitis.



Liberian Deputy Minister of Health Mr Tolbert Nyenswah



Mr Tolbert was addressing a team of African journalists who are visiting the Ebola affected countries. The journalists are on a media trip organised by the Directorate of Information and Communication and the Department of Social Affairs.

It would also act as a one-stop shop for data and reinforce countries' capacities for preventing epidemics and dealing with them — for example by creating a roster of experts and other professionals who could help to form a rapid-response force. © APA

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For more information on the African Union's response to the Ebola crisis, contact: Wynne Musabayana on

[MusabayanaW@africa-union.org](mailto:MusabayanaW@africa-union.org); Tel +251922406157