
CNN first to visit Ebola treatment centre, where the outbreak spiraled out of control

Thursday, August 7, 2014

PRESS INFORMATION

2014-08-07

Ebola: at the epicentre of the epidemic

David McKenzie, International Correspondent, CNN

The first thing I noticed when I arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, this week was an astonishing and eerie quiet. The pavements, normally jam packed with people, were virtually empty. The government had told people to stay at home for the day; shops were shuttered, traffic was scarce. This country is facing the worst Ebola crisis in history, and the atmosphere was nervous and fearful.

We were travelling to Kailahun district to visit a treatment centre at the heart of the epidemic – the first TV crew to do so since this outbreak grew out of control. On the way, as we passed through ever more stringent security checks at road blocks, the scale of the problem became increasingly clear. “We must pray,” said Mohammed Sisay, one of the few ordinary people we encountered. According to a Red Cross official, Ebola was “everywhere” along the road. Experts have warned that this country and the region simply cannot deal with the outbreak.

At the treatment centre itself we found the extraordinary team from Doctors Without Borders, working at the frontline of the battle against this deadly disease. Ebola isn't particularly contagious, but it is highly infectious. A tiny drop of bodily fluids is enough to infect someone. Already, dozens of doctors and nurses have died. At the centre they wear highly technical suits to help ensure their safety, but these brave workers are taking great personal risks. In spite of this, one doctor told me he simply had to come. “Without us there would be nothing here.”

As for the patients themselves, the prognosis is not good. 70% of confirmed cases will die. As we interview some of those being treated, strict regulations dictate that we must stand a few feet away from them. Isolated and afraid, one woman told me that her husband and son had died of the disease. She and her 12 year old daughter have Ebola, but they are determined to fight it and beat it, she said.

The centre is at capacity, and no one knows for sure how many cases are out there. A Doctors Without Borders official told me that they are “running behind” the outbreak and cannot catch up. Current levels of effort will simply not be enough to beat the disease, she said.

Without more help, I was told, this crisis could “never end.” The global implications for such an outcome are unthinkable.

VIDEO:

<http://edition.cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/bestoftv/2014/08/06/erin-david-mckenzie-ebola-sierra-leone.cnn.html>

CONTACT:

Emma Thelander

+46 76 318 75 86

emma.thelander@turner.com

ABOUT CNN INTERNATIONAL:

CNN's portfolio of news and information services is available in five different languages across all major TV, internet and mobile platforms reaching more than 380 million households around the globe. CNN International, awarded "News Channel of the Year" by the Royal Television Society in 2013 and 2014, is the number one international TV news channel according to all major media surveys across Europe, the Middle East and Africa, the Asia Pacific region and Latin America. The CNN digital network is consistently one of the top news and current affairs destination on the web. CNN has 42 editorial offices and more than 1,100 affiliates worldwide through CNN Newsource. CNN International is part of Turner Broadcasting System, Inc., a Time Warner company.