



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

Press release

Red Cross helps strengthen Sierra Leone's broken healthcare system

Freetown, 25 May 2015 – With basic and essential health services strained by the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, the Red Cross is taking steps to help reconnect communities with basic health services. Most health programmes stopped when the Ebola epidemic began one year ago, and are only now starting up again.

“Not only did hundreds of health care workers lose their lives to the disease, parents became frightened to take their children for regular vaccinations, believing they might become infected with Ebola. Consequently, a large number of young children have missed out on their measles vaccination and remain vulnerable should there be an outbreak,” said Moulaye Camara, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in Sierra Leone.

Beginning 29 May, and as part of a mass measles immunization campaign, volunteers with the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society will go door-to-door to check for unvaccinated children. Their parents will then be encouraged to take them to the mobile health units which are being deployed by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to villages across the country.

Aimed at reaching 1.5 million children, volunteers will explain to parents the need to protect their children against diseases other than Ebola. “Red Cross volunteers are trusted and respected voices within their communities and can play a key role in regaining the confidence of parents in national immunization programmes,” said Camara.

The week-long campaign follows from a four-day campaign at the start of May during which Red Cross volunteers raised awareness about the importance of measles vaccinations in communities across the country. That exercise is already resulting in positive changes in behaviour.

“Parents are coming back to the hospitals because they have started to trust again and appreciate us. They want to keep their children safe from diseases like measles,” said Melisand Bascho George, a child and maternal health nurse in Freetown.

Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of infant and maternal mortality in the world with a maternal mortality ratio of 1,165 per 100,000 live births, and an under 5 mortality rate of 156 per 1,000 live births. (WHO / Global Health Observatory 2013)

It has been one year since Ebola arrived in Sierra Leone, and while the Red Cross continues to respond to new Ebola cases, it is also planning for recovery which will, in part, include collaborating with government and other partners to strengthen the country's broken healthcare system.

“The Red Cross can play a vital role in ensuring community health programmes are stronger than they were before Ebola,” added Camara. “Our trained volunteers can rapidly deliver crucial and culturally sensitive health messages, enabling communities to make informed decisions about their health care. We must ensure that Red Cross volunteers are integrated into community health systems as they begin to recover.”

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network, reaching 150 million people each year through its 189 member National Societies. Together, IFRC acts before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. It does so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions. For more information, please visit www.ifrc.org. You can also connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Flickr](#).

Note to editors:

- Since 25 May 2014, there have been 12,632 confirmed, probable and suspected cases of Ebola in Sierra Leone, and 3,907 deaths
- The Sierra Leone Red Cross Society, with the support of IFRC and other Movement partners, has conducted 13,734 safe and dignified burials, disinfected 10,910 houses, provided psychosocial support to 267,221 people, and reached 2.2 million people with messages about Ebola
- Red Cross treatment centres in Kenema and Kono have admitted 921 people and discharged 489
- An emergency appeal of 54.3 million Swiss francs is currently 88 per cent funded.

For further information, please contact:

In Freetown:

- Lisa Pattison, Communications delegate, IFRC
Mobile: +232 788 057 41 , E-mail: lisa.pattison@ifrc.org

In Accra:

- Corinne Ambler, Regional communications coordinator, IFRC
Mobile: +233 266 444 374, E-mail: corinne.ambler@ifrc.org

In Addis Ababa:

- Katherine Mueller, Communications manager, IFRC Africa
Mobile +251 930 033 413 E-mail: katherine.mueller@ifrc.org

In Geneva:

- Reeni Amin Chua, Communications senior officer, IFRC Geneva
Mobile: +41 79 708 6273, E-mail: reeni.aminchua@ifrc.org