



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

Enhanced community engagement helps reduce attacks on Red Cross volunteers in Guinea

Conakry, 14 April 2015 – Enhanced face-to-face communication when educating communities in Guinea about the Ebola virus disease is helping to drastically reduce resistance and animosity towards its volunteers, says the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Security incidents, which include physical and verbal attacks, have dropped from ten a month at the start of 2015, to 8 in February, 5 in March and just one to date in April.

Ebola response coordinator for the Red Cross Society of Guinea, Dr Facely Diawara, says while even one such incident is unacceptable, the downward trend is encouraging and is due to several factors.

“We strengthened our communication strategy to concentrate more on interpersonal communication with communities. Our volunteers are taking the time to actively listen to families, to answer any questions people may have, and to talk through issues with them,” says Dr Diawara. “This two-way dialogue has allowed Red Cross volunteers to regain communities’ trust.”

Alseny Soumah from Coyah prefecture lost ten members of his family to Ebola and says he originally thought Red Cross volunteers were spreading the virus through their boots.

“Every time I saw them passing in my village I spit on them and hunted them with stones. One day they came into my house and they told me they wanted to talk with me and my family. I did not even want them in, but they insisted,” says Soumah. “They explained why they dress in protective clothing and why they spray the houses and dead bodies. I understand now, and I pledge to mobilize members of my community to let the Red Cross assist us so that we end this epidemic in our village.”

IFRC has embedded beneficiary communications volunteers with the Red Cross Society of Guinea within the investigative teams which deal with deaths in the community. This enables the Red Cross to negotiate with families before the arrival of the Safe and Dignified Burial teams and allows the body collection process to go more smoothly.

IFRC beneficiary communications delegate, Yvonne Kabagire, says in one village in Coyah prefecture, the community even asked volunteers for forgiveness for having attacked the Safe and Dignified Burial teams.

“I am proud of the community because little by little they are understanding that the Red Cross is there to support them in times of sadness and in times of joy. We will not abandon them,” says Kabagire. “I’m also very proud of our volunteers. This restored relationship could not have taken place if the volunteers had given up the fight against rumours, misinformation and reticence.”

The Red Cross Society of Guinea is also broadcasting, and will continue to broadcast, interactive radio shows nationally and in rural areas of lower Guinea several times a week, further maximizing communication with communities.

Dr Diawara says while community trust continues to increase, now is not the time to become complacent.

“We must stay vigilant and not let down our guard. As long as one country has one Ebola case, all three countries – Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone - are at risk. We plead with communities to avoid unsafe burials and to report all suspected Ebola cases.”

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](#).

Notes to editors:

- The Red Cross Society of Guinea currently has 162 volunteers participating in a door-to-door government campaign in Forecariah, to raise awareness of Ebola and detect potential cases early. The campaign aims to reach more than 500,000 households and runs from 12 - 15 April.
- The World Health Organization first publicly announced the West Africa Ebola epidemic in Guinea on 22 March 2014. Since the outbreak started there have been 25,550 confirmed, probable and suspected cases, and 10,587 deaths. In Guinea there have been 3,515 cases and 2,333 deaths to date.
- In Guinea, 2,630 volunteers from the Red Cross Society of Guinea have been trained to work on the Ebola response. This week, 1,080 of them were actively involved, tracing and monitoring people who have been in contact with Ebola patients, disinfecting homes, and burying the deceased. Red Cross community outreach teams in Guinea have reached 1,241,498 people through face-to-face education and sensitization campaigns.
- In Guinea, an emergency appeal of 28.5 million Swiss francs is currently 77 per cent funded.
- IFRC is currently implementing six emergency operations to support its response to Ebola. Together, they are worth more than 112 million Swiss francs, and target 39 million people.

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