

OFDA
Disaster
Case Reports

Sudan Ebola Fever Epidemic
September 1976

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
Agency for International Development
Washington, D.C. 20523

SUDAN - Ebola Fever Epidemic

Data

Date: September 1976 (FY 77)
Location: Western Equatoria Province near Zaire border
No. Dead: 150
No. Cases: 299

The Disaster

During the fall of 1976, hundreds of people died of what was suspected to be Marburg or "Green Monkey" disease in southern Sudan and northern Zaire. The World Health Organization (WHO) took the lead in organizing efforts to control the epidemic and investigate the disease. A team of experts from WHO and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) finally diagnosed the illness as a unique viral strain. Because the death rate was higher in Zaire than in Sudan, the new virus was named after the Ebola River in northern Zaire. A concerted surveillance program was initiated to canvas a large geographical area. Every village was visited to obtain data on deaths, illnesses and contacts, and to collect convalescent plasma. On December 24, 1976, the Sudan Minister of Health lifted the health restrictions in Western Equatoria Province because no new cases had been reported since the end of November.

Action Taken by the Government of Sudan (GOS)

When the proportions of the epidemic became known, GOS immediately placed a quarantine on the entire southern region of the country and enlisted the help of WHO. WHO then called upon the assistance of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta and several other agencies and individuals with expertise in the field of epidemiology.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

Among the international team of specialists assembled to investigate the disease was an American epidemiologist, Dr. Donald Francis. Dr. Francis had worked in Sudan two years earlier and personally knew many of the officials working on the problem. The USG was also asked to have available an aircraft which could be summoned on short notice to evacuate any member of the CDC/WHO team who might contract the disease. Fortunately, it was not necessary to use the plane, but a US Air Force C-141 transport was on call. On November 3, 1976, the U.S. Ambassador declared the situation a disaster and made \$25,000 available for relief efforts. Funds from this account were used to cover Dr. Francis' travel and expenses.....\$25,000

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Throughout October and November the U.S. Embassy worked closely with WHO and GOS officials in Khartoum expediting communications with individuals in Sudan, including members of the CDC/WHO team and with colleagues outside the country. In mid-November, at the request of the GOS, the USG provided a light aircraft and pilot for logistical assistance to the CDC/WHO team. The aircraft and pilot were financed through the Ambassador's Disaster Relief Fund.

TOTAL \$25,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies

None reported.

Assistance Provided by the International Community *

An International Commission was convened in October 1976 to combat the disease. Participants included medical personnel from Zaire, Belgium, Canada, France, South Africa, the Federal Republic of Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States, and WHO. WHO expenditures amounted to approximately \$150,000.

Federal Republic of Germany - unspecified quantity of drugs and protective clothing.

United Kingdom - gave one large generator and two large centrifuges; provided substantial laboratory support from medical establishments in England.

TOTAL \$150,000

* Please note: the figure for total international assistance is an approximation. In many cases the cash value of in kind aid is unavailable.

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