

African continent braces for coronavirus as epidemic worsens



Nairobi, March 19 (RHC)-- Countries in Africa are making every effort possible to avoid a possible spread of the coronavirus on the continent as the pandemic is currently ravaging the whole world with particularly violent outbreaks in China and Europe, Reuters reports.

After a passenger arriving over the weekend from Brussels, Belgium, at Cameroon's Yaounde Nsimalen airport, was found with temperature, health officials said he was hurried to a hospital and diagnosed within hours as the country's fourth case of COVID-19.

Like Cameroon, several countries in Africa were already doing generalized screening for diseases long before China revealed the new virus in December. The continent thus hopes its experience against Ebola and other outbreaks will help it deal with a pandemic that could quickly overwhelm its capacities.

"We have cases that were not caught by the measures in France and Italy that were caught here," Georges Alain Etoundi Mballa, who runs the health ministry's epidemic response, told Reuters, describing the screening as a "spying network." "Epidemics come and go, but we keep on the surveillance."

The virus was reported in at least 27 out of 49 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In most of them, the number of cases is still under 10 and all were imported from outside the continent. There is a lot at stake for Africa. If the virus gets to impoverished areas, conditions there would provoke an extremely rapid

spread.

Countries that did not report cases so far are also anticipating the catastrophe and taking preventive measures. Mali's government said Tuesday that it will suspend commercial flights from countries with the virus, while Niger is banning international flights and closing land borders for two weeks starting last Thursday.

Hospitals across Africa are already struggling with cases of measles, malaria and other deadly infectious diseases. Wars and conflicts have displaced hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed infrastructure.

Asking people presenting symptoms to self-quarantine at home is not feasible in many zones, where families live into a single room, share a communal tap or latrine, and survive on daily earnings. "Africa should brace itself for a serious challenge," the head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) John Nkengasong said earlier this month. "I still believe containment is possible, but only with extensive testing and surveillance."

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