

Beat: Miscellaneous

Liberian president replaces health minister, others over Ebola

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USPA News - Liberia's health and education ministers were among several officials replaced on Sunday as President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf expressed the need for an adequate team to overcome the Ebola crisis that has killed more than 2,800 people in Liberia alone. Sirleaf, in an address to the nation, emphasized the government's objective to eradicate Ebola from Liberia by Christmas, but said much remains to be done.

"This requires a team that is adaptable, responsive, disciplined, loyal, and focused - a team that is understanding of the prevailing challenges, and are resolved to respond by taking appropriate risks to get things done in time," she said. The leader said Health Minister Walter Gwenigale would be replaced by former civil service head George Werner, but added that Gwenigale will continue to serve as an advisor until his planned retirement in February. The ministers of Public Works, Education, and Social Protection were also replaced, while other people were appointed to take on other positions across the government. "It is my job to continuously vet and ready such a team for the challenges we currently face and those that lie ahead," Sirleaf said. "A few (people) are transferred or reassigned, signifying our recognition of their capabilities and performance. Others are dropped from where they served, but will be given appropriate opportunities to continue to serve the country." Sirleaf added: "My hope is that this team will take us to the finish line. But make no mistake, as captain, I will not hesitate to change anyone who fails to meet our expectations." Sunday's news came just days after Sirleaf lifted the country's state of emergency and said the national curfew would be reduced by one hour, citing progress in the fight against the deadly Ebola virus. A senior World Health Organization (WHO) official later expressed worry, warning that Ebola cases appear to be increasing now people "are relaxing their guard." The current Ebola outbreak in West Africa is believed to have started in Guinea in December 2013 but was not detected until March, after which it spread to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Mali. The outbreak features the Zaire strain of the Ebola virus, which is considered to be the most aggressive and deadly strain, having killed up to 9 out of 10 infected in previous outbreaks. As of November 11, at least 14,413 people have been infected with Ebola since the outbreak began, including 5,177 people who have died of the disease, according to health authorities in the countries involved. Liberia has been the worst hit country with at least 6,878 cases including 2,812 deaths, but authorities believe the actual figures are far higher.

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