



D.R.C

**PINK ELEPHANTS  
BLACK DEATH**

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Local villagers gather along a river where lies the body of an health worker of the MSF ebola treatment center in Katwa, the day after a nighttime attack by local militias. While running for his life immediately after the attack, the worker stumbled and fell to his death in this river nearby.

- ▶ North Kivu province, in the east of DR Congo, the scene since July 2018 of the second worst epidemic in the history of the virus: it has already claimed 1405 lives
- ▶ The number of victims is lower than that of the 2014 epidemic in West Africa, which claimed 11 thousand lives, thanks to the fact that during the intervening years a vaccine has been developed
- ▶ The authorities face enormous difficulties in stemming the epidemic: the greatest is the resistance from the local population, as many people believe that the virus doesn't really exist
- ▶ The presence of various militia groups, which have been fighting for 25 years for control of the area's rich mineral resources, is a further aggravating factor
- ▶ In March 2019, armed groups attacked two hospitals opened by Médecins Sans Frontières to treat patients affected by Ebola, forcing the organization to evacuate its Western staff



Congolese Ministry of health workers spray each other with disinfectant after decontaminating the house and personal belongings of a young man died of ebola the day earlier, in the village of Makangala. Decontamination teams are often verbally abused or attacked, and sometimes killed, by the local people, who believe they are the ones who actually spread the virus.



An aerial view of Butembo. With its more than one million inhabitants and poor hygiene standards, the city is a potentially catastrophic breeding ground for the outbreak.



A member of a funeral team in the Katwa hospital opens the coffin and the body bag containing a 2-year-old ebola victim during a so-called "dignified secure burial", a safety burial procedure set by the Congolese Ministry of health to allow the family a ceremony as similar as possible to the traditional one, while avoiding contagion risks. Many families, however, refuse this procedure and opt for the extremely risky traditional burial.



Dr. Jean-Christophe Shako, the Congolese Ministry of health coordinator for the ebola outbreak response, works the phones while being rushed to the site of an ongoing attack against the MSF ebola treatment center in Butembo, the second in three days.

## Ebola spreads in the Democratic Republic of Congo

In the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the second worst Ebola epidemic in the history of the virus has been raging since July 2018. So far it has infected almost 3200 people, killing over 2100 (data updated to 16 September). In spite of the existence of a vaccine that has proved to be effective concerning minor outbreaks, the number of new cases has been growing constantly (at an average rate of 20 a day).

The DRC health authorities cannot manage to contain the epidemic, after having been effectively left to fend for themselves following the evacuation of all the Western personnel of Médecins Sans Frontières after attacks on two hospitals run by the NGO. The greatest challenges healthcare workers face include the obstinacy of the local population that insists on believing that the virus does not exist or that it was an invention by the Kinshasa government to prevent them from voting in presidential elections, and above all the hostility from the militias engaged in a 25-year civil war, some of these have turned their guns also on health personnel.

The fear is that, should conditions worsen, the epidemic could spread beyond the country's borders into Uganda (where some cases have already been recorded along with the first two victims) and Rwanda and turn into a fully-fledged pandemic.



Congolese Ministry of health workers demonstrate the safety procedures to handle the body of an ebola patient to local tribal chiefs at a meeting in the village of Vuhovi, where a few days earlier unknown assailants have beheaded a nurse involved in the response.



The properties of a young man, died of ebola the day earlier in the village of Makangala, spread on the ground by Congolese Ministry of health workers while decontaminating the house and personal belongings of the deceased.



WHO's risk communication specialist Gratian Kalungero shouts at local villagers who just threw stones at a Congolese Ministry of health team, whose workers were decontaminating the house and personal belongings of a young man died of ebola the day earlier in the village of Makangala. Decontamination teams are often verbally abused or attacked, and sometimes killed, by the local people, who believe they are the ones who actually spread the virus.



A Congolese Ministry of health worker decontaminates the house and personal belongings of a young man died of ebola the day earlier, in the village of Makangala. Decontamination teams are often verbally abused or attacked, and sometimes killed, by the local people, who believe they are the ones who actually spread the virus.



The damages inside the MSF ebola treatment center in Katwa, the day after a nighttime attack by local militias, which torched part of the hospital.



An alleged Mai Mai militia leader speaks to local tribal chiefs at a meeting in the village of Vuhovi, where a few days earlier unknown assailants have beheaded a nurse involved in the response.



The members of a funeral team in the Katwa hospital get prepared for a so-called “dignified secure burial”, a safety burial procedure set by the Congolese Ministry of health to allow the family of an ebola victim a ceremony as similar as possible to the traditional one, while avoiding contagion risks. Many families, however, refuse this procedure and opt for the extremely risky traditional burial.



Katwa villagers argue with WHO's risk communication specialist Gratian Kalungero (right) in front of the MSF ebola treatment center, the day after a nighttime attack by local militias. Most of the local population strongly opposes the efforts to contain the outbreak.



A man carries a coffin balanced on his motorbike in Katwa.



At a checkpoint along the Beni-Butembo road, travellers are checked with a thermometer for fever, a probable ebola symptom, before being let through.



The body of an health worker of the MSF ebola treatment center in Katwa, the day after a nighttime attack by local militias, which torched part of the hospital. While running for his life immediately after the attack, the worker stumbled and fell to his death in a nearby river.



Congolese Minister of health Oly Ilunga Kalenga with Butembo mayor (right) and Dr. Jean-Christophe Shako, the Congolese Ministry of health coordinator for the ebola outbreak response (left). Kalenga paid an emergency visit to the region after local militias attacked the two MSF ebola treatment centers in Katwa and in Butembo in the space of three days.



Congolese Ministry of health workers decontaminate the house and personal belongings of a young man died of ebola the day earlier, in the village of Makangala. Decontamination teams are often verbally abused or attacked, and sometimes killed, by the local people, who believe they are the ones who actually spread the virus.



The brother of a young man died of ebola the day earlier in the village of Makangala stands beside his house's burning mattresses, which were torched as a precaution by a Congolese Ministry of health team which decontaminated the house. Decontamination teams are often verbally abused or attacked, and sometimes killed, by the local people, who believe they are the ones who actually spread the virus.



Congolese army soldiers in the MSF ebola treatment center in Butembo, the day after it was attacked and torched by local militias, the second such attack in the space of three days.



Congolese Ministry of health workers decontaminate the house and personal belongings of a young man died of ebola the day earlier in the village of Makangala. Decontamination teams are often verbally abused or attacked, and sometimes killed, by the local people, who believe they are the ones who actually spread the virus.



Women outside the hall where local tribal chiefs are meeting in the village of Vuhovi, where a few days earlier unknown assailants have beheaded a nurse involved in the response. The dummy body will be used for a demonstration of safety procedures when handling a suspect ebola case.



A Congolese police patrol in the streets of Butembo.



The body of an health worker of the MSF ebola treatment center in Katwa, the day after a nighttime attack by local militias, which torched part of the hospital. While running for his life immediately after the attack, the worker stumbled and fell to his death in a nearby river.



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NÉE A BUTEMBO LE 10/05/1977  
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