

Linus Torbor Gedeo (2014): Reporting Liberia. The Ebola Nightmare - National Realities versus International Reportage.

Like the nightmare of the over fourteen years' dreadful and deadly civil war, Ebola too will certainly be recorded in the sad chapters of Liberia's history. Its effects on our cultural and traditional practices and painful memories of thousands of our compatriots falling victim and cremated will continue to reverberate in our hearts and minds, even long after Ebola's chapter is closed.

The Ebola story will also have different versions and conspiracy theories. Theories such as Ebola - a man-made virus and the outbreak - a biological warfare experiment continue to win more followers.

I will shelve the chapters of the versions and theories for another day. I prefer to get focused on the national realities of Ebola crisis and the form and manner being trumpeted by the international media.

Terrible news of hundreds of new daily infections and lack of care units to accommodate the infected spread like fire on an oil field worldwide. Many of the international experts that signed up to Liberia for combat against Ebola confessed their families thought their decision was a death sentence. Few admitted and regretted how on arrival they thought touching anything Liberian was deadly. They eventually treated airport's staffers with disdain. They later realized the international reportage was far more scaring than the national realities.

There were several calls and emails from friends in Germany, USA and other parts of the world extremely worried about me - checking regularly to be sure I was not the next Ebola victim.

This massive and in most cases exaggerated media stream to the rest of the world fortunately attracted huge support to Liberia. Millions of dollars donated, thousands of health experts arrived and many temporary care units built for patients. On behalf of my country, I extend a great depth of gratitude to all nations, persons and institutions that joined the fight in all forms. I am also grateful to the international media for the high pitch of the trumpet and Ebola will soon be history.

What is however disappointing is the issue of stigmatization generated by the trumpet. Citizens of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone are now struggling to let the world understand they are not Ebola. I saw a photo of a Liberian holding a sign in the USA "I am a Liberian, not a virus" and an aura of sorrow overwhelmed me. So now it is not Liberians, Sierra Leoneans and Guineans at home but other parts of the world.

The first time I heard Ebola was in East Africa. The next thing I knew Ebola was next door in Guinea. And just before sunset, Ebola was in my community. Like all other viruses, Ebola knows no borders or nationalities. I frown on countries that think otherwise and prefer to preach the doctrine of collective guilt. The time to stop stigmatization is now and the international media needs to join the fight by also giving the same massive publicity to successes against Ebola.

No news does not always mean good news. Good news is also news worthy. These days I hear little and read little about Liberia's success against Ebola. Where are all the international journalists publishing images of congested Ebola care units, victims and burials in Liberia? Do not leave yet. Beds once filled are now empty. This too needs to be reported!

(Monrovia, November 25, 2014)