

Police disperse crowds claiming bodies of Ebola victims in DRC

BY BBC

KINSHASA. Police in the east of the DR Congo fired shots in the air after angry crowds attempted to reclaim the bodies of loved ones who had died at an Ebola treatment centre in Mongwalu, two local journalists told the *BBC*.

Sunday's unrest continued throughout the day, the reporters said.

The treatment centre, in a hospital compound, was the same place that was targeted overnight on Friday into Saturday, when an isolation tent was set ablaze.

The body of a dead Ebola victim is highly infectious and can lead to the virus spreading further when prepared for burial.

There have been more than 900 suspected Ebola cases in the current outbreak and 220 suspected deaths, officials say.

According to the Mongwalu General Hospital's medical director, Dr Richard Lokudu, Sunday's attackers demanded the bodies of two people be given to their families.

He told the *Associated Press* news agency that the hospital was on "general alert".

One of the dead was a Catholic shepherd, who was a "well-known local figure - a religious leader", a hospital official told AFP news agency.

Suspicion of the authorities and scepticism about the cause of death has led to deep distrust among some in the communities currently affected by Ebola.

Last Thursday, crowds set fire to isolation tents in hospital in Rwampara - a town 85km south-east of Mongwalu where cases are also concentrated - after they were prevented from taking the body of a man thought to have died from Ebola, away for burial.

Red Cross volunteers are carrying out safe burials under police protection to stop the virus spreading.

Three volunteers have also died from suspected Ebola likely caught while managing dead bodies, according to the organisation.

This comes as health ministers from DR Congo and neighbouring Uganda and South Sudan over the weekend finalised their cross-border co-ordination in response to the outbreak, alongside the head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC).

Yesterday, Uganda confirmed two new cases, both health workers, bringing its total infections to seven, with one death being recorded.

The patients are receiving treatment and people they have been in contact with are being traced, the health ministry said.

Africa CDC warned that other countries on the continent - namely Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia - are at risk from an outbreak.

The agency's director-general, Dr Jean Kaseya, said he DR Congo, Uganda and South Sudan, agreed on a \$236m (about \$hs 889 billion) budget to stop the outbreak from spreading.