

## Reparations go beyond money, ensure fairness and equity - Mahama to global leaders

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# General News

## Africa's prosperity and job creation depend on digital economy - Bawumia

By Andy Ogbarmey-Tettey

Former Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia has underscored the crucial role of the digital economy in Africa's development, emphasizing that technological innovation is key to unlocking prosperity and employment opportunities across the continent.

Speaking at Harvard University on Saturday, February 15, Dr. Bawumia stated that digitalisation is no longer an option but a necessity for Africa's economic transformation. He stressed that the continent must embrace the digital revolution to avoid being left behind in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as was the case with previous industrial advancements.

"We are in the midst of a global digital revolution," he asserted. "Artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing, and the Internet of Things are not just buzzwords; they are reshaping our world."

Dr. Bawumia highlighted Ghana's digital transformation over the past eight years, citing significant progress in financial inclusion, healthcare, agriculture, and public service delivery. According to him, digitalisation is essential for addressing long-standing structural challenges and enhancing efficiency

in governance.

"Our focus is on digital technology that can solve our problems," he explained. "We are not looking to have driverless cars or humanoid robots at this stage. We want technology that can improve access to credit, enhance public service efficiency, and boost economic opportunities."

One of Ghana's major digital achievements, he noted, is financial inclusion through mobile money interoperability.

"When we assumed office in 2017, 70 percent of Ghanaians had no bank accounts," he revealed. "However, with mobile money interoperability, we have extended financial services to over 90 percent of adults, making Ghana the only country in Africa with 100 percent access to financial inclusion."

This, he explained, has enabled businesses to grow without relying on physical infrastructure, creating a more inclusive and transparent financial ecosystem.

Beyond financial services, Dr. Bawumia pointed to the transformative impact of digitalisation on governance, agriculture, and healthcare. He stated that the introduction of the Citizens App and the integration

of government databases have significantly improved public service efficiency. In agriculture, the digitisation of farms and farmer databases has enhanced productivity and ensured better traceability of produce.

"Ghana is the only cocoa-producing country in the world with a fully digitised cocoa management system," he noted.

He also highlighted Ghana's leadership in medical innovation, stating that the country operates the largest medical drone delivery service globally, ensuring access to essential healthcare supplies in remote areas.

Concluding his address, Dr. Bawumia called for greater investment and collaboration among governments, businesses, and educational institutions to build a strong digital economy for Africa.

"The digital economy holds the key to unlocking Africa's vast potential and creating jobs for the youth," he said. "By working together, we can build a future where every African has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to a brighter tomorrow."

He urged African leaders to act boldly and strategically in leveraging digital technology to drive economic growth and social development.



Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, Former Vice President of Ghana

## Court to decide on Gyakye Quayson's defence in forgery, perjury case on March 3

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

The High Court in Accra will, on March 3, determine whether or not the Member of Parliament (MP) for Assin North, James Gyakye Quayson, should open his defence in the case in which he has been accused of forgery and perjury.

This decision by the High Court, presided over by Justice Mary Maame Ekue Yanzuh, follows the prosecution's move, led by Principal State Attorney Esi Dentaa Yankah, to close its case on February 13 after recalling the fifth prosecution

witness last Wednesday.

The prosecution called six witnesses to establish the charges of forgery and perjury against Quayson, who allegedly acquired a Ghanaian passport without renouncing his Canadian citizenship and made false declarations on his nomination form during the 2020 parliamentary elections.

The court will, in March, determine whether the evidence presented is sufficient for Quayson to open his defence.

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James Gyakye Quayson, MP for Assin-North

# General News

## Court to decide on Gyakyee Quayson's defence in forgery, perjury case on March 3

- Continued from page 2

The defence and state attorneys have been given two weeks to file their written submissions to enable the court to decide whether the prosecution has made a case for the MP to open his defence. James Gyakyee Quayson is facing

charges of forgery and perjury over alleged offences related to the 2020 Assin North parliamentary election. He has pleaded not guilty to five charges, including passport forgery, making a false declaration, perjury, and providing false information for

public office.

The prosecution claims Quayson falsely stated to the Passport Office that he did not hold a foreign passport when applying for a Ghanaian passport.

He is also accused of misleading the Electoral Commission (EC) by declaring that he had no allegiance to another country when he filed to contest the Assin North parliamentary seat.

## Osafo-Maafo exits NCA; committee to check data pricing established

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

**K**wadwo Gyamfi Osafo-Maafo has been relieved of his duties as Director of Cyber Security at the National Communications Authority (NCA) following a directive from the Minister of Communication, Digital Technology, and Innovation, Samuel Nartey George.

A statement signed by Chief Director Alexander Yaw Arphul on Friday, February 14, confirmed that the termination takes immediate effect. In line with the terms outlined in his appointment letter, Mr. Osafo-Maafo will receive three months' salary in lieu of notice.

"The Honorable Minister extends his gratitude for your service to the Nation," the statement read.

Mr. Osafo-Maafo was appointed to the role on August 1, 2021, under the previous administration. During his tenure, he played a key role in strengthening Ghana's cybersecurity framework by introducing advanced security measures to protect national communication networks from cyber threats. He also initiated training programs to enhance the cybersecurity expertise of NCA staff and stakeholders.

Following his departure, he has been directed to hand over his responsibilities to the Acting Director-General of the NCA, Rev. Ing. Edmund Yirenkyi Fianko, who was appointed to the position on January 24.

Meanwhile, Minister Samuel Nartey George has inaugurated

a 23-member Inter-Agency Data Pricing Committee in Accra. The committee, comprising key players in the digital sector, has been tasked with developing strategies to reduce the cost of

data for consumers.

This move comes amid growing concerns from mobile subscribers who argue that they are not getting value for money in terms of data

services provided by Mobile Network Operators (MNOs). The committee is expected to complete its report and submit recommendations to the minister by March 6.



Kwadwo Gyamfi Osafo-Maafo, Former Director of Cyber Security at the National Communications Authority (NCA)

# General News

## 3.5m students benefited from Free SHS policy and not 5.7m - Former Education Minister clarifies

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Former Education Minister Dr. Yaw Osei Adutwum has clarified that 3.5 million students, not 5.7 million, have benefited from the Free Senior High School (Free SHS) policy since its inception.

Speaking to the media on Friday, February 14, Dr. Adutwum acknowledged the previous overstatement and took responsibility for the error.

“The Free SHS policy has transformed education in Ghana, allowing millions of students to pursue their dreams without the worry of school fees.

“There was an error in the figures previously mentioned, and I take full responsibility for that. The correct number of beneficiaries stands at 3.5 million,” he explained. Despite the oversight, he reaffirmed the policy’s crucial role in expanding access to education and reducing financial barriers for Ghanaian families.

He urged continued support for the initiative, stressing the need for ongoing improvements to sustain its impact.

“Free SHS has changed the trajectory of education in Ghana, and we must do everything possible to ensure its continuous improvement.”

Dr. Adutwum, who served as Education Minister from 2021 to 2024, remains a staunch advocate of the program, calling for collaboration to enhance its effectiveness and long-term success.

The current Education Minister, Haruna Iddrisu, had questioned the accuracy of the reported beneficiary figures for the Free SHS program put forth by the previous administration.

During his inaugural visit to the Ministry of Education, Mr. Iddrisu cast doubt on claims that the initiative had supported 5.1 million students over a seven-year period.

“I am not saying mine is right, but 5.1 million was misleading because I have looked at the numbers from 2017 to 2023, and I am convinced that the number of students who have benefited from the Free SHS policy stands at not more than 3.9 million.”

According to him, the contrasting beneficiary figures require an audit to verify the exact number.

“One of the very first major issues the country must interrogate is the statistical validity of how many Ghanaians have benefited from Free Senior High School. But I need a validation of that data to begin with,” he explained.

Before leaving office, former President Akufo-Addo praised the Free Senior High School policy introduced by the New Patriotic Party (NPP) government in 2017, describing it as a transformative initiative that impacted 5.7 million young Ghanaians. He made this statement during the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2024.

However, Education Minister Haruna Iddrisu has emphasized the need for verification to establish accurate data on the program’s beneficiaries. He clarified that this effort is not meant to challenge previous reports but to ensure reliable statistics that will guide future educational policies and reforms.

The current administration aims to assess Ghana’s education sector and implement evidence-based reforms, leading to calls for a National Education Conference. According to Mr. Iddrisu, verifying Free SHS figures will serve as a crucial starting point for these discussions.

Meanwhile, during the presentation of the 2024 Mid-Year Budget Review in Parliament, then-Finance Minister Dr. Mohammed Amin Adam disclosed that the government had invested GH¢9.9 billion in implementing the Free SHS policy since its inception.



Dr. Yaw Osei Adutwum, Former Education Minister

# General News

## Be professional in your line of work or risk sanctions - Health Minister cautions healthcare providers

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Minister of Health, Kwabena Mintah Akandoh, has urged healthcare professionals to uphold professionalism and treat patients with respect and compassion.

Speaking at a cholera awareness event at the Winneba Government Hospital, the minister expressed concern that unprofessional and discourteous behavior by some healthcare workers discourages individuals, particularly the elderly, from seeking medical care, even when urgently needed.

While acknowledging the dedication and competence of most healthcare workers, he emphasized that a small fraction tarnish the profession's reputation through poor patient interactions, leading to fear and distrust in the healthcare system.

"We have fantastic and very

professional health workers, but there are a few bad nuts among them, especially in the way some of you handle patients. Sometimes, you will be surprised to hear that somebody may be sick, especially the aged. If you ask him or her to go to the hospital, they will say, "The nurse will insult me or shout at me," he said.

He appealed to healthcare workers to maintain professionalism regardless of provocation, stressing that patients should always be treated with dignity and care.

"Irrespective of the level of provocation, we expect you to be very professional. It's an appeal to the few bad nuts among you. Some of these issues I will take seriously. It doesn't mean we are going to come after someone, but it is important for us to protect our patients and also make them feel comfortable," he added.

The minister also highlighted that the manner in which patients are treated has contributed to declining attendance at some public healthcare facilities, as many people now opt for private hospitals instead.

To address the issue, he announced plans to enforce stricter disciplinary measures against misconduct while also committing to improving working conditions to help alleviate the frustrations healthcare professionals face.



Kwabena Mintah Akandoh, Minister of Health

## I didn't spend over GH¢173,000 on office furniture at PMMC - Sammy Gyamfi clarifies

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

Acting Managing Director of the Precious Minerals Marketing Company (PMMC), Sammy Gyamfi, has refuted claims that he spent GH¢173,940 on refurbishing his office, including purchasing new furniture and a refrigerator.

In a Facebook post on February 15, Gyamfi dismissed the allegations as "completely baseless," emphasizing that he had made no changes to his office since assuming office on January 20, 2025.

"I have made no changes to my office since assuming office as Ag. MD for the PMMC on 20th January 2025. All the things in my office, including the chair, desk, fridge, etc., were there before I assumed office. Not even the A4 sheets or

pens on my office desk have been changed. This fact can easily be verified by any reasonable person," he stated.

He further alleged that these accusations were part of a misinformation campaign orchestrated by members of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), whom he accused of spreading falsehoods following their electoral defeat.

Gyamfi urged the public to be cautious about disinformation, encouraging them to verify claims before accepting them as facts.

"The general public is humbly entreated to be on the lookout for fake news from the desperate NPP. Kindly double-check claims made by their communicators and social media surrogates, lest you fall prey to their deliberate disinformation narratives," he added.

The reports alleging that Gyamfi spent GH¢173,940 on new office furniture, a refrigerator, and office renovations at PMMC gained traction on social media, drawing widespread criticism.

His appointment as Acting

Managing Director of PMMC has also faced scrutiny, with some questioning his qualifications and suitability for the role. Despite the criticism, Gyamfi has reiterated his dedication to serving the country and ensuring the smooth and efficient operation of PMMC.



Sammy Gyamfi, Acting MD of the Precious Minerals Marketing Company (PMMC)

# General News

## My concession is being looted by galamseyers – Asantehene cries out

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

The Asantehene Otumfuo Osei Tutu II has expressed deep frustration over the encroachment of illegal miners on his mining concession, warning that their activities could have severe environmental and economic consequences.

“The site that was given to me has been invaded by illegal miners. Meanwhile, I had plans to give it out for proper mining. We must find a way to solve this crisis,” he stated.

During a meeting with the Minister for Lands and Natural Resources on Friday, February 14, he lamented that despite ongoing government interventions, the illegal mining menace remains unresolved. He called for stronger enforcement measures, including the deployment of security forces to protect mining areas, improved regulation of small-

scale mining, and sustainable job alternatives for those engaged in illegal mining.

“These children who are engaged in galamsey need jobs. We need to assist them so they don’t go back to the sites,” he added.

The Asantehene’s concerns add to mounting pressure on government authorities to implement effective strategies to combat illegal mining and safeguard Ghana’s natural resources.

Despite several initiatives—including the deployment of military personnel to water bodies and forest reserves, as well as the arrest and prosecution of culprits—the activities of illegal miners persist.

The Ashanti Regional Minister, Dr. Frank Amoakohene, on February 6, issued a stern two-week ultimatum to individuals engaged in illegal mining in forests and waterways, warning them to vacate these areas

or face the full force of the law.

Dr. Frank Amoakohene reaffirmed his commitment to protecting the region’s natural resources and fully supporting President John Mahama’s vision of promoting responsible mining.

“Anyone mining in the forest reserves should vacate those places. We are giving them up to two

weeks. If you are mining within the forest reserves and don’t want to be on the bad side of the law, you have two weeks to leave the place,” he declared.

The minister further revealed plans to rid water bodies of mining activities, stating that his administration is fully prepared to act.



Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene

## Mahama to deliver 2025 State of the Nation Address on Feb. 27

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

President John Mahama is scheduled to present his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) on February 27, as programmed by Parliament. This was announced by the Majority Leader and Leader of Government Business, Mahama Ayariga, on the floor of Parliament on Friday, February 14. The Office of the President communicated this date to Parliament, and it was confirmed during the session.

The delivery of SONA by the president aligns with the constitutional mandate stated in Article 67 of the 1992 Constitution. According to this article, the president is required to present the SONA at the beginning of each session of Parliament and may also deliver a supplementary SONA at the end of the session to update the nation on the state of the country.

In his second term under the 9th Parliament, President Mahama is expected to outline Ghana’s current state and his administration’s strategy for navigating the country

through this challenging period, especially as Ghana remains under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) support program.

With Ghana’s ongoing economic challenges and recent warnings from the World Bank regarding the government’s fiscal decisions, many expect key issues to be addressed in the upcoming speech. The IMF’s recent discussions with the government, including talks on scrapping certain taxes and recommendations to tackle the country’s growing debt crisis, are also crucial topics.

Additionally, President Mahama is expected to address important sectors such as education, health, and energy. On January 3, the immediate past president, Nana Akufo-Addo, outlined the state of the economy, which has now been handed over to the Mahama-led administration.

Former President Akufo-Addo highlighted the resilience of Ghana’s economy, which faced significant hurdles, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the

IMF-supported Post-COVID-19 Programme for Economic Growth (PC-PEG), his administration stabilized the economy.

“Economic growth has also returned to the pre-COVID trajectory, with an impressive growth rate, rising from 4.8 percent in the first quarter of 2024, 7 percent in the second quarter, and 7.2 percent in the third quarter. It is projected that this year’s growth rate will be 6.3 percent, significantly higher than

the 3.4 percent my administration inherited in 2017,” he said.

President Akufo-Addo also emphasized strides in healthcare, including the Agenda 111 project to expand access to medical facilities and the revitalization of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Coverage now includes critical treatments for childhood cancers and sickle cell disease, reflecting a commitment to enhancing health equity.



John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana

# General News

## Burkinabe, 3 Togolese nationals killed in bus attack at Walewale

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

Four more people have died after gunmen attacked and set fire to a bus in Walewale on Friday, February 14. The victims, including one Burkinabe and three Togolese nationals, were shot and injured during the attack. One person was burned beyond recognition. The bus was reportedly traveling from Pulmakom to Kumasi when unknown gunmen attacked it and set it ablaze.

This incident follows recent cases of violence and disturbances in the region, allegedly linked to the ongoing Bawku conflict, which has resulted in several fatalities and injuries. The bus, registered GR 7501-21, had departed from the ADT station at Pulmakom

in the Pusiga District but broke down near Loagri, close to a police barrier.

On Friday, February 14, the driver left for Tamale to find a mechanic, leaving the bus in the care of the police, the mate, and the passengers.

Eyewitnesses say armed men arrived, opened fire on the passengers and police, and forced everyone to flee. They shot multiple people before setting the bus on fire.

Initially, three people, including a toddler, were found burned to death. Another body was discovered in the charred vehicle on Saturday, raising the death toll.

One of the injured victims admitted to Walewale Hospital also died the

same day.

By Sunday, February 16, two more victims, who had been transferred to Tamale Teaching Hospital, succumbed to their injuries, bringing the total number of deaths to seven.

The escalating situation has prompted the Interior Minister to impose a 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. curfew on Walewale and its environs. The government's move has met opposition from the youth who believe a curfew will not resolve the underlying challenges.



Accident scene

## Reparations go beyond money, ensure fairness and equity - Mahama to global leaders

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

President John Dramani Mahama has called for global action on reparations, emphasizing that efforts must go beyond financial compensation to ensure fairness and equity.

He made this call during a speech at the 38th Ordinary Session of the African Union (AU) Assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on February 15, 2025. Speaking at the summit, Mahama highlighted the lasting consequences of historical injustices and the need for a comprehensive approach to reparations.

He noted that the implications of slavery and colonialism continue to affect generations, with descendants of enslaved Africans still facing systemic discrimination, racial prejudice, and economic disparities. He stressed that the economic toll on Africa due to the loss of both human and material resources during colonial rule amounts to trillions of dollars in damages.

"It is clear that the legacy of colonialism and the slave trade has not only harmed Africa but has contributed to a global system of inequality," Mahama asserted.

He urged the international community to recognize that reparations are not just about financial compensation but about restoring dignity, equity, and justice to millions of people whose ancestors were victimized by these brutal systems.

Mahama called for a future in which African nations and people of African descent are no longer burdened by the injustices of the past but are instead empowered to achieve justice, equality, and prosperity. He urged the African Union and the international community to come together to ensure that reparations move from theory to action, contributing to a fairer, more just world for all.

"As we reflect on the historical injustices of the past, we must strive for a future that is fair, just, and equitable for all," Mahama said. "Reparations are not just a

matter of financial compensation; they are about restoring the dignity and rights of those whose lives were torn apart by centuries of exploitation."

Over the years, African leaders' calls for reparations from the international community have focused on acknowledging historical injustices, addressing long-term economic harm, restoring dignity and justice, healing historical wounds, and promoting development and empowerment in African nations.

They seek not only financial compensation but also systemic changes, such as addressing economic disparities, the exploitation of resources, and the imposition of artificial borders—factors that have led to long-term economic instability and underdevelopment in many African countries.

Additionally, they advocate for international cooperation in investing in education, healthcare, infrastructure, and other critical areas necessary for progress.



John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana



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# Business

## Ghana's Credit Facility program to undergo 4th review in April by IMF

By Phoebe Martekie Doku

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) will conduct a formal review of Ghana's progress under the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) program in April 2025, assessing the country's economic performance and commitment to agreed policies.

A delegation from the IMF, led by Stéphane Roudet, recently visited Ghana from February 10 to 14 to engage government officials and stakeholders on economic developments and the country's financial strategy.

According to Roudet, the discussions focused on Ghana's adherence to key program commitments, which will be evaluated during the fourth review of the ECF arrangement.

"The mission team engaged the Ghanaian authorities on recent

macroeconomic developments. It also started discussions on the policies that will underpin the 2025 budget. This dialogue is set to continue over the coming weeks.

"We also took stock of the authorities' progress in meeting key commitments under the Fund-supported program. These will be formally assessed in the context of the fourth review of the Extended Credit Facility arrangement, which is expected to be undertaken in April 2025," he added.

The IMF emphasized its appreciation for the cooperation of Ghanaian authorities, acknowledging the role of President John Mahama, Finance Minister Cassiel Ato Forson, and Bank of Ghana's Acting Governor, Millison Narh Asiama, in the discussions.

In December 2024, the Executive Board of the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) completed the third review of the US\$3 billion, 36-month Extended Credit Facility (ECF) arrangement, which was approved by the Board in May 2023. The completion of the third ECF review allowed for an immediate disbursement of SDR 269.1 million (about US\$360 million),

bringing Ghana's total disbursements under the arrangement to about US\$1.9 billion.

The outcome of the April review will determine Ghana's eligibility for further financial support under the IMF-backed program.



Stéphane Roudet, IMF Chief to Ghana

## Underdeclaration by ECG affecting payment to IPPs, transmission grid companies - Energy Minister

By Abigail Twumwaa Ampofo

Minister of Energy and Green Transition, John Abdulai Jinapor, has attributed challenges in payments to Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and transmission grid companies to the under-declaration of revenue by the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG).

In an interview on TV3's Hot Issues, aired on February 16, the minister spoke about the financial mismanagement of the power-producing company and its impact on the country's energy crisis, following a PwC report that highlighted significant under-declaration of revenues by ECG.

The minister revealed that he experienced the "shock of my life" after requesting ECG's first-month report, where he discovered that "the ECG collects about 1.5 billion, and about 5 billion is not declared as far as the Cash Waterfall is concerned." "...So this 5 billion we are talking about is money that is collected. The ECG fails to declare this money and decides to appropriate and spend it. When they do that, the IPPs will not be paid, generators will not be paid, transmission grid companies will not be paid, and even the statutory levies

will not be paid," he noted.

He further accused the former Energy Ministry and the Finance Ministry, which constitute the Cash Waterfall Mechanism Committee, of being the masterminds behind the unlawful spending of ECG's under-declared revenue of five billion Ghana cedis (GHS 5bn).

According to him, "There is a Cash Waterfall Mechanism Committee which is being reconstituted. The ministry is represented by the Ministry of Finance, and they determine the formula to apportion the money. So if ECG decides to apportion the money, what it means is that they keep the money and spend it in-house. So this 5 billion we are talking about is money that is collected. The ECG fails to declare this money and decides to appropriate and spend it."

Ghana's energy sector is currently in crisis, with debts exceeding \$3 billion and threats of shutdowns from Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and transmission grid companies. The Energy Minister-designate, John Abdulai Jinapor, has acknowledged the urgency of the situation and highlighted the need for pragmatic solutions to resolve the debt crisis and ensure sustainability.

Plans include negotiating with

IPPs, implementing robust financial management, and introducing policy reforms, especially at ECG, where he has placed a ban on any procurement deals until a new committee is constituted. Measures to avert power outages (dumsor) include stabilizing power supply, increasing generation capacity, and promoting renewable energy.

Additionally, IPPs like Karpowership have threatened to suspend electricity supply due to outstanding debts, making it crucial for the government to take swift action to prevent prolonged outages and stabilize the

sector.

### About the Cash Waterfall Mechanism (CWM)

The CWM is a financial model implemented as part of Ghana's Energy Sector Recovery Programme (ESRP) to ensure fairness and transparency in distributing energy revenues among electricity distribution companies. The mechanism aims to equitably distribute monthly revenue collections by the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) based on beneficiaries' invoices and their share of the Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURC) tariff.



John Jinapor, Minister of Energy

# International

## UN chief warns DRC conflict risks escalating into a regional war

Speaking at the African Union summit (AU) on Saturday, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that a regional escalation of the conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) must be avoided at all costs.

The AU's 55 members are meeting as the Rwanda-backed M23 fighters continue their advance in the eastern DRC, on Friday claiming to have entered the region's second largest city, Bukavu.

"The fighting that is raging in South Kivu, as a result of the continuation of the M23 offensive, threatens to push the entire region over the precipice," Guterres told leaders at the summit.

"There is no military solution. The deadlock must end, the dialogue must begin, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the DRC must be respected,"

he said.

In recent weeks, M23 rebels have captured swathes of the DRC's mineral-rich eastern region, including the key city of Goma, capital of North Kivu province.

With international pressure mounting on Rwanda to curb the fighting in eastern DRC, the conflict was set to dominate the summit at AU headquarters in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa. DRC's President Félix Tshisekedi continues to plead with the international community to intervene to contain the rebels and blacklist Rwanda for backing them.

He did not attend the gathering, but Rwanda's President Paul Kagame was seen attending meetings at the summit. Rwanda has not admitted to backing the M23 but has accused extremist Hutu groups in the eastern DRC of threatening

its security.

Amid fears of the conflict spilling over into neighbouring countries, the AU has been criticised for its timid approach to the

fighting and observers have demanded more decisive action.

Source: Africa News



Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General

## Mauritania progressing towards zero leprosy cases

Mauritania has witnessed a significant decline in leprosy cases since thanks to sustained efforts that have led to improvements in prevention, detection and treatment. Only 17 new cases were recorded in 2023 compared with 42 reported in 2010.

Among the key aspects in the country's fight against leprosy – an infectious bacterial disease that mainly affects the skin, nerves and mucous membranes and can cause severe disabilities if not detected early and treated – are prevention, active case finding, treatment of complications and combating stigma.

For Mariam\*, a resident of Arafat district in the capital of Nouakchott, dealing with stigma after being diagnosed with the disease, which she initially thought was a simple skin problem, has been especially difficult, she says. "I was surprised by the leprosy diagnosis, but I decided to stay calm and focus on the treatment. The hardest part was coping with the stigma: the looks and judgements of other people were often too hard to bear."

In at-risk communities, especially low income and with limited access to health care, an active screening system helps in early case detection, increasing the chances of recovery without sequelae and curbing the spread of the disease. "To be effective, the full course of the treatment must be followed, between 6 and 12 months, depending on the severity of the case. A patient under treatment is no longer contagious," says Dr Salma Yahya, dermatologist and medical officer in charge of diagnosing and treating patients with leprosy at the National Hospital Centre of Nouakchott. In the efforts to raise public awareness

and reduce stigma, health personnel and community workers insist on the importance of seeking early medical attention. "We ensure that anyone affected by this disease, wherever they are, have equal chance to be diagnosed and treated," says Dr Elhadj Malick Kane, coordinator of the National Tuberculosis and Leprosy Control Programme.

Mauritania eliminated leprosy as a public health problem. Thanks to sustained efforts by the Ministry of Health with support from World Health Organization (WHO) and partners.

WHO continues to support Mauritania in addressing the threat of leprosy. More than 30 health workers have been trained in early diagnosis and effective treatment. The Organization provides medicines and supports contact tracing as well as diagnosis and preventive treatment within families and communities to interrupt transmission. Thanks to the holistic approach that comprises treatment, public awareness drives and monitoring of patients has seen treatment completion rate rise to over 90% in 2023.

"Thousands of patients have been cured thanks to the free treatment. We are continuing our efforts to support the country to achieve interruption of transmission and complete elimination of leprosy through early detection, effective treatment and enhanced community awareness," says Dr Babacar Dieye, in charge of encompass neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) at WHO in Mauritania. Our support covers all neglected tropical diseases to strengthen the country's health system and sustainably improve the quality of life of the populations."

Mauritania is working towards interrupting transmission and achieving zero cases of leprosy. Combating stigma is a key component in achieving these goals. "Leprosy is often perceived as a disease that cause disability and many mistakenly believe that it has been eradicated. This [belief] fuels stigma," says Dr Yahya. "With awareness campaigns, the population understands the disease better, and this helps to reduce stigma."

Mauritania has also integrated leprosy screening and treatment into its comprehensive NTD control programme.

For patients, post-treatment monitoring is helping to manage complications and reduce the chances of recurrence.

"I had monthly appointments to check my health and adjust the treatment if necessary," says Mariam. My doctor always answered my questions and reassured me about the treatment and follow-up. The quality of care I received was excellent."

\* Not her real name.

Source: WHO



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