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**HEALTH** - A decade after the end of Liberia's long and bloody civil war, Ebola has become the country's new scourge. The disease, which has already killed 2,964 Liberians and infected approximately 7,000 citizens, has exposed the inability of its government to deal with it, Nobel laureate Leymah Gbowee said.

The virus has challenged the peace and progress of Liberia, Gbowee told students Nov. 20 at Seton Hall University. The Liberian social worker, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for helping to bring down the regime of dictator Charles Taylor and end years of brutality and corruption, warned students that Ebola could unravel peace in the country.

For months, all schools have been closed, many businesses boarded up, hospitals overwhelmed -- with some forced to close -- and two airlines have stopped flights into Monrovia, Liberia's capital. Ebola has become the new enemy from within, she said.

Its eradication will not come from military troops, but rather from local action by informed communities learning to take steps to prevent the spread of the disease, Gbowee said.

While she expressed gratitude to President Barack Obama for responding to the crisis, she said her country needs health care workers more than it needs 3,000 troops, which she called a

waste of money.

"We have had years of no one paying attention to health care," Gbowee said. Health care providers lack such standard resources as gloves, masks and bleach to help them maintain basic hygiene, she said.

She blamed the governments of Liberia and its neighbors, Sierre Leone and Guinea, for not acting until senior government officers came down with Ebola.

"Corruption and lack of coordination all played into this virus," she said.

Together, the three West African nations have reported more than 15,100 cases of Ebola and accounted for more than 5,400 fatalities over the past eight months.

In September, Obama outlined steps to curb the outbreak of the disease, which included plans to enhance public health care across Africa. The administration is directing its 3,000 military personnel to construct 17 health centers, each with 100 beds, to treat victims. The troops also plan to train 500 health care workers per week.

Gbowee said women bear the biggest burden of the disease: They account for 75 percent of Liberia's Ebola fatalities. That's understandable, she added, as the virus is spread through contact -- with saliva, blood, urine and fecal material -- and women remain the nation's primary caregivers.

"Educate the people in this country," she urged the students. "Tell them they cannot get Ebola just from shaking hands with a Liberian."

She said her "brave sisters" -- Christian and Muslim -- who protested with her against the civil war are back again organizing roadside prayer vigils and distributing leaflets on the importance of hand-washing. Their local education campaign includes information sessions, the distribution

of posters, and outreach efforts to equip local communities to fight the virus.

Gbowee pointed to many examples of "women organizing to supply awareness." She encouraged students "to practice local before you go global," underlining that getting involved in one's own community is the best way to solve problems.

Empowering local women to take action against injustice, inequality and abusive situations is the best means of dealing with such problems and of guaranteeing leadership to effect change, said Gbowee, whose life was uprooted by the outbreak of civil war when she was 17.

While she spent weeks telling herself how unfair life was to her at the time, Gbowee said she also learned to think on her feet. She learned how to find food and care for family members and internally displaced people. She learned how to live for years as a refugee while raising six children.

When she and six other women decided they would risk their lives marching for disarmament and an end to the war, they were joined by hundreds more all wearing white T-shirts and praying, singing, dancing and carrying placards demanding peace along the route taken daily by their despotic president.

Taylor finally agreed to talks, held in neutral Ghana, and eventually went to jail for 50 years. She, at age 39, went to Oslo, Norway, and shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and with Tawakkol Karman, a Yemeni journalist and human rights activist.

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