

February 06, 2015



**HEALTH** - "Sierra Leone is on its knees but hope is growing day by day," Archbishop Edward Tamba Charles of Freetown told the Agency MISNA. His country was the hardest hit by the epidemic of Ebola, with 3,000 confirmed deaths and over 10,000 cases of infection. But now, as confirmed by the latest figures from the World Health Organization, the most difficult stage is over and we can try again to make a fresh start. "This is thanks," the archbishop emphasizes, "to a collective commitment".

Archbishop, according to the WHO, the number of cases continues to decrease

"There are data that fill us with hope. They confirm a trend that has been going on for weeks, with a gradual reduction of new infections. Last Monday (12 January - ed) schools reopened in Guinea and even here, if the improving trend is confirmed, children could resume classes as early as March."

How was it possible to achieve these results?

"At the beginning, Ebola caught us by surprise. It was something completely new and we did not know what to do. We were overwhelmed and external aid was fundamental. There was the

contribution of Doctors Without Borders and other NGOs, but we must not forget the awareness campaigns promoted by the Government of Sierra Leone and the commitment of local religious and traditional leaders. We, as the Catholic Church, joined the Ebola Prevention Network. But no result would have been reached without the collective effort of all."

Did Ebola force you to change any habits? And in the life of the Church, in particular, what changed?

"In agreement with the Muslims and other religious communities we gave instructions aimed at avoiding the spread of the epidemic. We asked the faithful not to shake hands at the sign of peace during mass. I gave the communion host in the hand, always explaining the basic elements of the necessary precautions. However, we never told the people not to come to church and participation in services remained high.

What impact will the epidemic have from an economic point of view?

"The first problem is unemployment. There has always been unemployment, but now it's gone out of control. Some foreign companies, including mining companies, closed and let local employees go. The impact of Ebola has been devastating for the catering and entertainment sector. We hope that with the end of the epidemic foreign companies will come back and that the economy can get on its feet again. We can start from agriculture, one of the areas hardest hit. We need to get back to the fields right away and hope that by September-October there will be a really good harvest".

Source: Agenzia Info Salesiana, January 30, 2015