



Two major health threats

Roger Dirokpa, from our Companion Diocese of Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, reports on the effects of Covid-19 and the resurgence of Ebola

The first case of coronavirus was detected in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), on 10 March 2020. Since that date there have been 459 confirmed cases and, as of 27th April, there have been 28 deaths from the disease.

On 19th March, President Félix Tshisekedi put several measures in place to limit the spread of the coronavirus. He closed schools, universities and colleges across the country for 4 weeks, banned gatherings, meetings and parties of more than 20 people and closed churches. The President also announced a ban on sports activities and the organisation of mourning in halls or homes. Bars, terraces and nightclubs will also remain closed until further notice.

Not only are we struggling with the coronavirus but we are also threatened with the haemorrhagic fever disease, Ebola, in the province of North Kivu in Beni.

We thought we could close the chapter on Ebola, as it had been more than a month since the last reported case, and, on 3rd March, the discharge of the last patient from the Ebola Treatment Centre. Sadly, this optimism was unfounded as, on 10th April, it was announced that a 26-year-old man had died from the disease in Beni, a location which has seen a disproportionately large number of reported cases. Ebola has killed 2,273 people since the first case on 1 August 2018 in the east of the country.

On 24th March, Mr Tshisekedi declared a state of emergency during a televised speech, as well as the lockdown of the capital city, Kinshasa.

The DRC is better prepared than previously to face new epidemics, especially in the east of the country where new rules have been put in place: temperature tests at the borders, reporting of suspected cases by health centres, improved awareness in local communities and the training of health personnel.

Lockdown measures are difficult to implement economically and socially across the DRC, as a large percentage of the population lives in poverty and deprivation. Furthermore, an explosion in cases of domestic violence against women has been reported during lockdown.

The Congolese people have not stopped praying, even if the churches are closed. Each family organises prayer sessions imploring God to come to our aid and praying that Covid-19 and Ebola will be brought under control around the world.

