

Coalition of Caregivers and Advocates for the Elderly in Liberia (COCAEL)
Monrovia, Liberia, West Africa

PRESS RELEASE

Liberia Older People Recognized on World Older People Day amid Ebola Crisis

(October 15, 2014) - In observance of World Older People Day held globally on October 1, the Coalition of Caregivers and Advocates for the Elderly in Liberia (COCAEL) held an impressive ceremony to recognize the contributions of older people in Liberia amid the on-going Ebola crisis on the same day under the theme: **“Do not leave Liberia’s Older People Behind.”**

The event was held at the S. Trowen Nagbe United Methodist Church and brought together a group of older people, representatives of provider agencies of Old Folks Homes and community-based organizations catering to older people in various communities, the Ageing Unit of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of Liberia and advocacy groups for the elderly.

Notably absent from the event was representative of any international organization and the government did not issue a proclamation in recognition of the day as is usually done for other international celebration. However, interestingly few days to the event, the president of Liberia, HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, issued a proclamation in recognition of World Tourism Day.

Among those who spoke at the event was Ms. Belinda Knuckles, Director of the Ageing Unit of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Chairman of the COCAEL, Rev. Anna Kpaan and other distinguished personalities who attended the event.

In their separate speeches, the speakers recognized that much needs to be done to improve the quality of life of older people in Liberia, especially in the wake of the Ebola epidemic. The Ebola crisis so far has claimed over 4,000 lives and there are over 8,000 suspected cases, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

They also called for support to be given to COCAEL to enable the organization to build the capacity of its member in order for them to adequately respond to the needs of the older people they are serving.

Some of the older people, who attended the event, also made remarks. They raised concern about the lack of adequate attention being paid to their welfare by the government. They then commended COCAEL for bringing their caregivers and advocates together in order to serve them effectively.

They also praised the organization for organizing an Ebola response campaign to cater to them during this Ebola crisis despite the fact that no one, including the government and international organizations, is giving any specific attention to older people in this crisis.

It can be recalled that recently the COCAEL set up an Ebola Response Committee to design strategies and mobilize resources to provide an effective Ebola response for older people in Liberia.

The COCAEL Ebola Response Committee comprises representatives of provider agencies, caregivers and advocates who attended a Consultative Meeting of the group held on Tuesday, September 9, 2014 in collaboration with the Ageing Unit of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW). The meeting, which was held at the Conference Center of the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church in Monrovia, was facilitated by the Center for Community Advancement and Family Empowerment (CECAFE) of the Social Work Department of the United Methodist University.

The officials of the COCAEL said it is placing more emphasis on its Ebola response to ensure that older people in Liberia, who are also bearing the brunt of this health crisis, remain survivors and not victims of the deadly Ebola virus.

The COCAEL Ebola Response Committee has begun a campaign of soliciting items to enable the group to provide food items, preventive and awareness materials for older people residing in old folk's homes and various communities in Montserrado and other counties.

The group is therefore appealing to the public, humanitarian organizations, corporations and philanthropists for donations of food items, preventative materials (buckets, chlorine, soap, etc.) And awareness materials (posters, flyers, etc.) to be distributed to older people, as its contribution to the fight against this pestilence.

A press release issued by the group also advised that all donated items can be dropped off at the Refuge Old Folks Home located on Ashmun Street, which has been designated as the Receiving Point for all donations made to the Coalition for distribution to its membership. Also those wishing to contribute to the group's efforts can contact Secretary General of the COCAEL, Pastor Aaron George, through the phone and email contacts provided.

Signed:

Pastor Aaron Paul, Interim Secretary

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