

Portrait of Doctor Oumarou SALISSOU



The last two outbreaks of the Ebola Virus Fever having successively occurred in the Democratic Republic of Congo have seen the full participation, whenever necessary, of all the health professionals to the response against the epidemics. Whether it be the Congolese staff or those who came to their rescue, none of them spared their effort to engage effectively in the fight against this deadly disease said to be one of, if not, the deadliest diseases the world has ever suffered. Doctor Oumarou Salissou who work for MONUSCO health clinic in Goma, North-Kivu province is one the staff who actively lends their support.

When the Ebola virus Infected patients were found in Bikoro, near Mbandaka in May 2018, Doctor Oumarou was deployed in that area by his management office to ***“prevent the Ebola cases from affecting the staff. “I was assigned three objectives,”*** he said:

- ***To organize awareness sessions on prevention: focused on the definition of the disease, the modes of transmission and the precautions to take to avoid being contaminated.***
- ***To check the passengers flying on board MONUSCO aircrafts, through setting up temperature checking strategy for passengers both when departing and when arriving at Mbandaka airport.***
- ***To establish temperature checkpoints at each access point to MONUSCO facilities and to set up handwashing points at that level.***

The mission was successful in so far as not a single case of individual or collective stress, nor yet of the Ebola virus disease among MONUSCO staff was reported.”

Mission accomplished for the Doctor, should we applaud. we are very delighted to note that. By the way, can you share with us the challenges faced while conducting your mission? ***“ There were no major challenges as our support services were prepared to respond to any request. ”*** Did you have any worry for yourself and your colleagues? ***“ Being the medical focal point, I have never been worried for myself. I was rather worried for my colleagues on the day when we received report of six Ebola cases in Mbandaka.”*** A legitimate worry, anyway, because the Ebola virus is very contagious, I believe. It is transmitted to human beings by wild animals and from human beings to other human beings through contact with contaminated blood, fluid or stuff. ***“It causes severe hemorrhagic fever to human beings. The early symptoms that appear after 2-21-day incubation are the following: headache, muscle pain, weakness, diarrhea, vomiting as well as internal and external bleeding.”*** We should keep on raising awareness and getting people to ***“apply handwashing every time, avoid closer contact with the Ebola patients whether in hospital or out, avoid attending burial ceremonies in places where Ebola is reported and restrict public physical contacts in the said areas. ”*** Doctor, is there any remedy available? ***“ No, only prevention! However, there is a vaccine which is at its experimental stage, used in the affected zones; we are now on the third series of its utilization. A special attention must be given to eligibility to the vaccine. Only the following persons are entitled to the vaccine: medical staff and their assistants who treat the patients and any person who has been in contact with the patient: the patients’ family members and all those who share the same environment with them.”***

Another Ebola outbreak was reported near Beni, any contribution on your side? ***“ During the epidemics reported in Beni, besides the moral support I brought to all the colleagues working in Beni, I also assisted the staff in Goma in setting up handwashing points, distributing hand-washing points with sanitizers fluids, and in holding collective sensitization sessions.”***

And you did your best to make everyone feel confident, didn't you? Your line supervisor, Doctor Moustafa Aly and your colleague Doctor Lucio Victor, who advocated for your portrait of the month extolled your professional and human qualities. All this can be verified though your statement: ***“ as a doctor working for the United Nations, I do not restrict myself to the cases brought to me within the mission. I would like to extend my contribution to include the treatment of the Vesical-Vaginal Fistula (FVV), affecting women who have been victims of rape or sexual assault as a result of which they continually lose urine; those cases are currently treated by Goma Heal Africa. With the competence gained in the military area, I am considered to be a reference for our military medical activities within the mission. In this capacity, I am often involved in efforts to support our colleagues who are victims of trauma.”*** This is a proof to the high-level conscientiousness displayed by Dr. Salissou when fulfilling his part within the mission in a particular context of the Congolese territory.



But let me take you backward Doctor, to try to know more about you. When did you get to DRC? ***"I got to the DRC as medical officer in 2014. My duty station was Goma, at the military command headquarters. I spent a year there before returning to my country. Thereafter, I got a position as UN volunteer (UNV); I came back for the second time, in May 2016. Ever since, I have been in Goma, at MONUSCO Clinic."***

Would you please tell me if working for the United Nations, was your choice or just a happy coincidence? ***"I opted for working for the United Nations for the purposes of gaining international experience."*** What about your Education background? ***"I studied Medicine at the University Abdou Moumouni in Niamey, NIGER, where I got a degree during the period 1983-1989. I am a military physician with the rank of Colonel Major."*** Can you now take us through your professional career and experience since then? ***"Upon completing my education on 15 December 1989, I was assigned to the Ministry of Defense in Niger at the rank of aspiring Doctor and I assumed the office of Doctor for the troops, at the 6th Motorized Saharan Company in Dirkou, in Northern Niger's desert. In 1991, I was promoted to the rank of Captain and assumed the position of Regional Director for Military Health in Agades. Eight years later, in 1999 I was selected to follow a specialized training in surgery at the Military Health School of Alger, where I graduated on 26 March 2006 as surgeon specialized in***

Urologic Surgery and in vesical-vaginal fistula surgery (the most prevalent female injury in DR Congo, due to rapes). I worked for the National Hospital Lamorde (University Hospital); besides serving as a surgeon, I assumed the position of assistant professor of surgery and was responsible for the nurses and surgeons in the district. In May 2013, I was appointed deputy director for the "Centre National de Référence des Fistules Obstétricales" in Niamey/National Reference Center for Obstetrical Fistula. Promoted to the rank of colonel Major and, after serving at MONUSCO as Medical – Administrative Director for the military Force, I decided to trade my military uniform with the UNV's in order to share the experience I accumulated for more than 20 years in the international arena."

Here is one of the questions I usually ask colleagues: do you think the multicultural environment in which we work is an extraordinary opportunity or a barrier? ***"The position I occupy allows me to say the multicultural environment is very big opportunity people should not miss to cement their knowledge and learn from others. There are so many things to gain."*** Do you mean you maintain better relationship with your colleagues? ***"I am always ready to assist my colleagues with whom I often share the lessons learned."***

Jean-Jacques Bongo, the Field Operation Manager at MONUSCO Mbandaka had this to say about him: ***"I met him for the first time during the Ebola outbreak in Equateur province; he is a man with high-level professional skills who he is always to provide assistance and advice to fellow staff members as well as to the staff from UN agencies and other organizations on the attitude to keep when faced with outbreaks. He provided an excellent psycho-social support to the Mbandaka Mission; he ensured that everyone was comfortable. Everyone received appropriate attention from him. Doctor Salissou is one of the best advisers one might dream of...Every morning, when visiting the different sites, he listens, advises and responds to the staff members' concerns; he was a real breath of fresh air in the scorching heat of Mbandaka. A real gentleman!"***

Doctor Oumarou Salissou is from Niger, mainly from ***"the MARADI Housa ethnic group."*** What is so special about the members of the Hausa ethnic group from MARADI? I asked him. ***"The members of the Hausa ethnic group from Maradi are basically traders."*** Hum, I can see you are breaking the ranks...I believe life is not just about working; you should have some hobbies and moment for relaxation devoted to the family, friends or just for you to enjoy and relax ... Will you please take through your hobbies? ***"I love sport, more particularly football."*** I am not surprised at all! My other hobbies are reading, watching TV, dancing, listening to music!! ***"I also love gardening and doing handicraft and for fun, I love listening to the rumba."*** You should know that the rumba involves some dancing. ***"Yes, but...(laughs)"*** doctors do not like dancing; however, they are the first to advise people, in secrecy, to relax, to do some exercises...It sounds



like “do what I am telling you to do but do not do what I am doing”; Oh! I see, but next time I am going to hold your hand! By the way, do you live with your family? **“ Yes, from time to time, my family joins me. I am married and father of 6 children including one daughter.”** Don’t complain, a girl is worth ten boys nowadays and you would be the Love of her life! While we are dealing this issue, let me jump to the Gender balance; do you make sure gender balance is included into your activities? **“I believe gender balance is essential for the smooth functioning of the society. We should not allow ourselves to sideline a portion of the society and pretend everything is running smoothly. I always make sure that in my activities, women, men, young, adults, elder persons alike are taken into consideration.”**

Regarding our presence and work in DRC, do you think the UN is doing enough or little...?

“ UN contribution in DR Congo is huge in my opinion, in spite of the obstacles, UN is doing its best to contribute to the stabilization of this country.” What about your dream for the DRC? **“I pray for UN to attain its objective of achieving peace in the DRC.”** We should leave some day; when it is time, what memories are you going to keep about the DRC? **“The experience from working in a conflict zone, in a very captivating country.”**

Men like you, Doctor, will ever be remembered by DRC, as your collaborator Bienvenue Kabala Mutuza, a nurse who works for MONUSCO clinic in Goma put it so nicely **“Dr OUMAROU SALISSOU is courteous, always willing to help and very honest. He is very sensitive to other people’s misfortunes. He is compassionate and always willing to provide support to whomever in need.”** That would be the best way for us to wrap up our conversation.

By Aïssatou Laba Touré

Translated by Alphonse Yulu Kabamba