FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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World Relief Calls Americans to Partner in Response to Ebola’s Public Health Emergency Status in the Democratic Republic of Congo

BALTIMORE, Md. – Earlier this month, the World Health Organization formally declared the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) after the first case was diagnosed in Goma, at the border of Rwanda. Having worked in the country for nearly two decades, World Relief is mobilizing churches in the DR Congo to respond, urging Americans to give with compassion and generosity to serve those affected and contain the virus’s spread.

“Ebola is not just a problem for DR Congo; it’s becoming a global health crisis,” said Scott Arbeiter, World Relief President. “The church has the unique ability through its local engagement and cultural understanding to raise awareness, promote safe health practices in communities and locate those in need in their communities more effectively than the government and foreign NGOs.”

World Relief’s response to the crisis pairs church volunteers with community health workers to repair or replace handwashing stations in targeted health facilities and equip churches with handwashing stations where they are lacking. With 90% of the population in the DR Congo professing to be Christian, local pastors have unparalleled influence to disseminate information encouraging improved hygiene and medical intervention, providing knowledge of the disease and addressing their congregation’s false fears.

As the first Ebola outbreaks occurred in Liberia and Sierra Leone in 2014, medical interventions and government messaging failed to contain the disease but rather pushed communities to hide or deny its existence. However, once faith leaders began sharing from religious texts about accepting Ebola workers and survivors in their services, their communities began to understand that Ebola-control practices were not irreligious. These leaders’ messages helped drive out the stigma associated with Ebola in highly religious areas, curbing the disease’s spread across the globe.

Recognizing the urgent need to anticipate and deter the virus’s further spread, World Relief is focusing efforts also on the bordering country of South Sudan through the relationships it’s built in Ibba County since beginning its work there in 2012. Before an outbreak occurs, World Relief will mobilize community volunteers to teach their communities about the disease, how it spreads and can be prevented, as well as providing soap, handwashing buckets and menstrual management kits to improve hygiene.

“World Relief’s work combating HIV/AIDS in Rwanda is a poignant example of how effective the local church can be in raising awareness and preventing a global epidemic from spreading by addressing the root causes,” commented World Relief CEO Tim Breene. “We urge our supporters to partner with us in prayer and compassionate giving as we seek to protect millions of lives made in the image of God.”

World Relief asks its supporters to respond in generosity so they can reach their goal of raising $150,000 for this crucial and life-saving work in the DR Congo and South Sudan. Two-thirds of these resources will
be used to improve the physical, emotional and spiritual health of communities in the DR Congo and one-third will be used in South Sudan.

Those interested in supporting this cause can donate at www.worldrelief.org/ebola.

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About World Relief:
World Relief is a global Christian humanitarian organization that seeks to overcome violence, poverty and injustice. Through love in action, we bring hope, healing and restoration to millions of the world’s most vulnerable women, men and children through vital and sustainable programs in disaster response, health and child development, economic development and peacebuilding, as well as refugee and immigration services in the U.S. For 75 years, we’ve partnered with churches and communities, currently across more than 20 countries, to provide relief from suffering and help people rebuild their lives.

Learn more at worldrelief.org.