Ebola: Then and now

NAME: Margaret HARRIS
ROLE: Communications
DUTY STATIONS: HQ Switzerland, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone

THEN

“I was in Sierra Leone at the end of September 2014 when the Ebola outbreak had come roaring into Freetown. The sense you had was of a complete overwhelming of systems.

There was nowhere for people to go. People understood that they did need to get help, but the hospitals, the Ebola treatment units, everything was overwhelmed. People had bodies in their homes and were asking for the burial team to come and those bodies could be there for 3 or 4 days.

One of the difficulties was the perception that WHO wasn’t doing enough and it was a combination of trying to present the strength of the work that was being done, while still trying to indicate that much, much more help was needed.”

NOW

“If we fast forward to this year, and I have just been in Sierra Leone, it is completely different. I spent some time talking to a woman who was one of the last Ebola patients to be treated recently. The people caring for her were Ebola survivors and had been employed to work in the wards. She said, ‘They understood what I was going through, they could talk to me, they helped me to eat.’ They got her through that illness.

I am looking at a country that now knows how to deal with Ebola and can offer real care and real hope of overcoming this illness.

There has been a year of very strong work, and WHO and partners have been able to put in place a strong Ebola response that has brought this almost to a close. We’re very, very close.”