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WE WANT YOU TO LIVE

A FILM BY CARL GIERSTORFER



with

STANLEY JUAH, MABEL MUSA, TAWOO BONO, REVEREND VICTOR G. PADMORE, EMMANUEL DWEH

Writer & Director **CARL GIERSTORFER** Editor **MARCEL OZAN RIEDEL (BFS)** Camera **CARL GIERSTORFER**
Sound **LAURA SALM-REIFFERSCHIEDT** Line Producer **MAREIKE MUELLER** Producer **MAX SALOMON**
Field Producer **LAURA SALM-REIFFERSCHIEDT** Production Assistant **FRIEDA JAGE** Original Music **OLAFUR ARNALDS**
Sound Design & Edit **SEBASTIAN TESCH** Rerecording Mix **FLORIAN BECK** Colorgrading **FABIAN SPUCK**
Translations **FELUSU SWARAY, HAWA BOEHNER** Legal Advice **DR. RALPH OLIVER GRAEF**
for SWR/ARTE **BERND SEIDL** Executive Producer **ANTJE BOEHMERT**

Produced by **docdays**
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In Co-production with  and **SWR»** in collaboration with **arte** Produced with support of  **Pulitzer Center**

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WE WANT YOU TO LIVE

Liberia's fight against Ebola

Tuesday, January 12, 2016 - 9:45pm on ARTE

Synopsis

"WE WANT YOU TO LIVE - Liberia's fight against Ebola" is a documentary about the devastation the Ebola outbreak has brought upon Liberia. How do people experience an epidemic that was out of control for months, that destroyed the country's health system and left fear and mistrust in cities and villages? "WE WANT YOU TO LIVE - Liberia's fight against Ebola" tells the story of Stanley Juah, a father of four who, through one of his sons, brought the virus to his village and who is now held accountable for the deaths of fourteen people. Stanley's last hope rests with a Reverend who tries to seek the community's forgiveness on his behalf. There are health workers such as the nurse Mabel Musa who struggle in the face of this biblical task. After thousands who have perished, Mabel realizes how her country and her people are starting to surrender to this epidemic.

Story

“WE WANT YOU TO LIVE - Liberia’s fight against Ebola” is a deeply human story in times of Ebola. The film strictly takes the Liberian perspective; it focuses on the experience of those, who are condemned to stay, condemned to die and also condemned to live.

Stanley Juah has survived the Ebola virus. On the day of his release from the Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU), Stanley visits the Ebola cemetery in a nearby forest. His gaze wanders over the recent graves; there are already more than ninety, and the gravediggers continue to dig new ones in silent anger. A month ago, Stanley made a fatal decision: he took his son – a high-risk contact – out of quarantine and brought him to his village, Taylor Town. The villagers were against this decision. “Why take such a risk?” asked the village elder. “Your son could carry the virus and infect many people.” But Stanley stood by his decision.

Only a few days after Stanley's son had arrived in the village, he showed first symptoms of the disease and died – but not before infecting several others. First, his siblings fell ill, then Stanley himself. Finally, more than 20

people got infected in Taylor Town. After one month, 14 had died. After his release from the ETU Stanley knows: the people of Taylor Town are seeking revenge; they have threatened to kill him. He hides out in the capital, Monrovia, where he spends his days in apathy. “I don't know why God spared my life,” he says. His only remaining hope is a reverend who tries to mediate between him and the enraged villagers of Taylor Town. While Stanley hides in Monrovia, the Ebola outbreak reaches its peak in rural Liberia. The virus finds its way ever deeper into remote villages, inaccessible for all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, or helicopters. The sick struggle on forest paths to clearings where nurse Mabel Musa and her team load them into their pick-up trucks. Today, Tawoo, his mother Gbelawoh and his aunt Ponawenee came to a forest clearing. They are frightened and show signs of the fever. Ponawenee will be dead four days later while Tawoo will continue to fight the virus. “Am I going to die before my children?” Tawoo asks himself the day his aunt is buried. The disease made him lose weight. But Tawoo is determined to live: he wants to return to his village and his family. His fight against the

virus lasts four weeks. Then, he returns to Bomota where they welcome him with open arms – quite unlike Stanley.

“WE WANT YOU TO LIVE - Liberia’s fight against Ebola” depicts the battle that everyone in Liberia had to fight during these difficult times. Some struggle with their guilt and seek redemption. Others are courageous and still question their actions. Ambulance nurse Mabel Musa risks her life on a daily basis. For a long time, she was too frightened to take on this job – too many of her colleagues had died already. It was her boyfriend Alex Mulbah who finally convinced her to help. “The virus will find its way to me anyhow,” she says. Ebola will change Mabel’s life, will weld her and her boyfriend together, will let their relationship grow and – eventually – give them a child. And still: every day, Mabel prays to God to end this dying. She donates a third of her salary to church so that Ebola will finally disappear from her life – a life that will never again be as it was, simply because she cannot forget the many dead.

Stanley, on the other hand, would rather follow the dead. He feels condemned to live. On a Tuesday in February 2015, he returns to Taylor Town to finally face the angry villagers. With support of the reverend, he seeks redemption – but is Taylor Town ready to forgive?

Press note

“WE WANT YOU TO LIVE - Liberia’s fight against Ebola” tells the story of a people’s struggle against Ebola. It is an intimate, character-driven portrait of four people that reveals the unforgiving reality of surviving and defeating the deadly virus. Director Carl Gierstorfer and journalist Laura Salm-Reifferscheidt spent two months in Liberia where people opened up to them in ways that make this documentary a touching and unique inside view of the Ebola epidemic.

This film not only shows the dangerous work of nurses and doctors on the front line. It also tells the aftermath of an epidemic that took its tolls in villages and communities all over the country. Now, that Ebola has vanished from the news, it provides an important insight into the long-term consequences of the worst public health disaster in recent history. Ebola hit when Liberia began to recover from a brutal civil war. An invisible enemy, that randomly kills, Ebola sowed hatred and distrust in communities that only recently have managed to live together peacefully. This is why the film is more than another documentary on Ebola. It is a testimony to the resilience of those who have been affected and a reminder that epidemics can destabilize entire regions for decades to come.

Protagonists



MABEL MUSA is an ambulance nurse. Together with her team, she tours the Liberian countryside in two pick up trucks, collecting the sick and bringing them to the next Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU). At first Mabel struggled for a long time whether to take on the job or not. Too many of her colleagues had died while helping the sick. But together with her boyfriend, Alex Mulbah, she decided to help – a decision that has changed her life.

„We were all frightened. But I love to save life, I love my career. So it was better to go back and join the fight against Ebola.“

„I keep thinking, when I lie down. I always find myself in the field, picking up patients. Patients dying on the car, at the ETU. I still see them. Maybe I will forget some, but for what I went through it is something I will live with.“



STANLEY JUAH has survived Ebola. Yet, he has lost his entire family. People in his village, Taylor Town, are threatening to kill him. When Ebola came to Liberia, Stanley was the General Community Health Volunteer. Still, he decided to take his son out of quarantine in Monrovia and bring him home. The people in Taylor Town said, he shouldn't do it; the risk was too high. But Stanley did not listen. His son became ill and infected his own family and more than 20 people. Fourteen of them died.

„I just should die and follow my people. I don't know why God spared my life?“

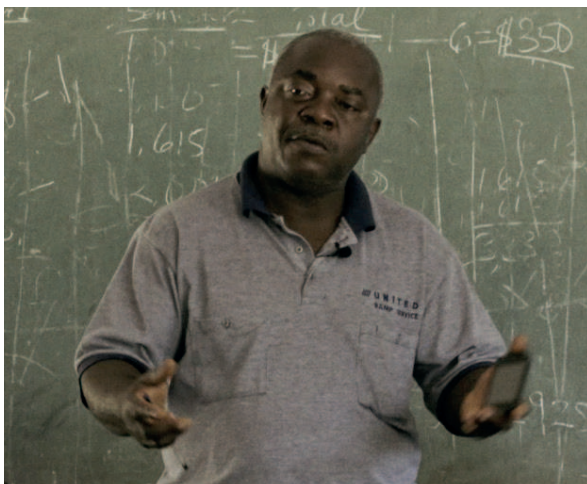
„As I stand here I don't have anybody. My mind is troubled. I am alone. I am as good as dead.“



TAWOO BONO, is mother Gbelawoh and his aunt Ponawenee are marked by fever and exhaustion. At the edge of the forest they are waiting to be taken to the Ebola Treatment Unit, frightened of what will happen to them. For Ponawenee it is already too late. Four days later she will be dead. Tawoo wins the fight against the virus and survives. He mourns the loved ones he has lost, but does not waste time to get his life back and look after his family again.

„Well, I thank God. But when I wake up in the morning, it can be hard for me! My back ... I am feeling pain in my back! My ankles and my knee...”

„Mama and Papa, please stop the denial of Ebola. Ebola ist real! It is in Liberia. It is killing our people and destroying our country.“ (Radio Gbarnga)



PASTOR G. VICTOR PADMORE
Even though every day less people get infected and die, the distrust the Ebola virus has sown is not yet overcome. Nobody knows this better than Reverend Padmore, who takes care of a large community in Bong County. For weeks, he has been trying to mediate between Taylor Town and Stanley. He believes Stanley has to ask the people of Taylor Town for forgiveness. Only then will he be able to find peace.

“It's not easy to be a man, but now you are becoming a man. There are things you don't want to take, you have to take — because you have a responsibility!” (The Reverend talks to a young man who wants to kill Stanley. His late mother was infected by Stanley's son, and now he has to look after his siblings.)

„But one big thing is that we got to still go on. How can we manage to go on? Even though some bad things happened here, there is still hope.“ (Rev. Padmore in Taylor Town)

Director

CARL GIERSTORFER is a Berlin-based documentary filmmaker who gained his BSc in Biology from University College London. He has produced and directed films for networks worldwide. Carl Gierstorfer's work has received numerous awards, among them a Silver Dolphin in Cannes. His latest documentary THE BLOODY TRUTH – tracing the origin of HIV – was broadcasted 2014 by ARTE and was shown in 17 countries. His writings have been published in publications such as Nature, the Economist and The Sunday Times.



Director's Note

The hysteria surrounding the Ebola outbreak flared up just as fast as the topic would eventually disappear from the media. With only a few exceptions, the news focused mainly on the international relief effort. All too often, clichés of the “dark continent” were revived.

What wasn't told was the story of those, that were most affected by the virus: Liberians who fought for their own people. In fall 2014, I travelled to Liberia together with journalist Laura Salm-Reifferscheidt. We wanted to get an insight into the outbreak and see how Liberians themselves were dealing with Ebola.

We encountered a country in a state of emergency; its people under constant threat of de-

Ebola, the invisible enemy, that randomly struck, demanded impossible choices: should you be courageous or rather hide? Ebola killed indiscriminately and turned the innocent into guilty.

“Let's not fool ourselves. As in any major crisis around the world, the people who act and respond to those crises are first and foremost local people,” Joanne Liu, President of Doctors Without Borders, reminded us. International relief organizations such as Doctors Without Borders and the International Medical Corps provided invaluable support by building Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs). They trained staff and set up an infrastructure. But in the end, it were the Liberians themselves, who confronted

the Ebola virus. They tried to understand how it spread and changed their behavior accordingly. It was this change in behavior that eventually stopped the further spread of the virus.

We chose an inside perspective for the documentary, because Ebola is a “social” virus. It

infects those, who look after their loved ones; it infects doctors and nurses and those who bury the dead in traditional ways.

We therefore dedicate this film to the victims, the survivors and those who fought at the front lines in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea.



Background

In December 2013 a two year old boy died of a mysterious illness in the Guinean village of Meliandou. Back then, no one suspected that this boy would trigger the largest of any Ebola outbreak since the discovery of the virus in Central Africa in 1976. On March 25, 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported an outbreak in Guinea with 86 infected and 59 casualties. Two days later, the virus had reached Guinea's capital Conakry. Shortly after, Liberia announced its first deaths. Sierra Leone soon followed. As of September 2015 the CDC and the World Health Organization (WHO) have counted a total of 28,287 people infected; 11,309 of whom have died.

While Liberia suffered most casualties, it also was the first country that has succeeded in defeating the virus. On September 3, 2015 Liberia was officially declared Ebola-free. And yet, the suffering for the Liberia people continues. The aftermath of this outbreak will affect them and burden their country for years to come.

When the Ebola virus emerged, Liberia was on a slow and bumpy road to recovery after two civil wars that had ravaged the country for over a decade. Ebola brought Liberia to its knees once again. The health care system collapsed, countless doctors and nurses died. Routine vaccinations were no longer administered, and infectious diseases such as measles began to spread.

Beyond the medical sector, the impact of Ebola is also devastating. Schools and universities remained closed for months. The economy contracted. Foreign firms and mining companies have drastically reduced their activities in Liberia. Quarantined farmers could no longer work their fields. The psychological effects are also devastating: the survivors are stigmatized, and there is anger with those, who did not help, because they were too afraid. Liberians now say Ebola is worse than the war, because during times of war you knew your enemy and could go the other way. With Ebola, your loved ones turned into mortal enemies and there is no way to hide.



Credits

Writer & Director	.....Carl Gierstorfer
Editor	.....Marcel Ozan Riedel (BFS)
Camera	.....Carl Gierstorfer
Sound	.....Laura Salm-Reifferscheidt
Executive Producer	.....Antje Boehmert
Line Producer	.....Mareike Müller
Producer	.....Max Salomon
Field Producer	.....Laura Salm-Reifferscheidt
Production Assistant	.....Frieda Jage
Original Music	.....Ólafur Arnalds
Rerecording Mix	.....Florian Beck
Colorgrading	.....Fabian Spuck
Translations	.....Felesu Swaray & Hawa Boehner

with Stanley Juah, Mabel Musa, Tawoo Bono, Reverend Victor G. Padmore & Emmanuel Dweh

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Alexander Gibson, Siaka Goakai, Philip Jacob, Meow Johnson, Jerome Kamara, Emmanuel Kollie,
Ponawenee Liyen (†), Jefferson Massah, Alex Mulbah, Elvis Ogwen, Gweningalee Pewee, Peter Sackie,
Wehaty N. Sangalaine, Rebecca Seweyan (†), Zina Smith, Augustus Sumu, Sakie Yah

Samson Arzoaquoi, Moses Bailey, Maia Baldauf, Armstrong Bee, Naimah Binda, Edwin G. Black,
Thomas Brillisauer, Ryan Burbach, Sean Casey, Sambhavie Cheemalapati, Anita Cole, Yarmah Cooper,
William Davies, Friederike Feuchte, Thomas Joe Gbetee, Dutch Hamilton, Josh Harris, Bendu Ho,
John Jenson, Lahar Kamara, Comfort H. Kollie, Dennis Kollie (†), Jimmy Kerkulah, Solomon Kollie,
John Korkoyah, Kai Kupferschmidt, Edwin G. Lackie, Joanne Lee, Heather Lorenzen, Marcus Malayea,
Nessie Massaquoi, Fran Miller, Jeffery N. Quenisear, Johnson Quiepon, Eoin Ó Riain, Morten Rostrup,
Robert Sandow, Stuart J. Sia, Tankred Stoebe, Joshua Wilkie, Thomas Williams, Moses Yah

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PRESS CONTACT/ INTERVIEW REQUESTS

Silke Lehmann

lehmann@greenhouse-pr.com
+49 (0) 151 681 000 88

Antje Boehmert

DOCDAYS Productions
ab@docdays.de
+49 (0)30 473 779 311

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Documentary

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