EULESS, Texas—Carolyn Woahloe said what everybody was thinking: Some Texans are blaming her and fellow Liberians for the first Ebola case to be diagnosed in the United States.

It started after Thomas Eric Duncan traveled to the Dallas area from West Africa, became ill and eventually tested positive for the deadly virus that has killed more than 3,000 people in West Africa. In the days since, Woahloe and others have heard the whispers and taunts.

“Go back to Liberia.”

**Being Liberian Doesn’t Equal Ebola**

On Wednesday night, Woahloe, a registered nurse, appeared with several Liberian pastors and community leaders to spread the word: Please don’t blame Liberians.

Woahloe said she got calls from at least two Liberian workers who said colleagues told them they should leave the United States and that she told the callers to stand their ground.
“If I am Liberian, that doesn’t mean that I have Ebola,” Woahloe said at a news conference at the New Life Fellowship Church in this Dallas suburb. “This is not a Liberian problem. This is a world problem.”

A group of about 10 leaders stood together as a sign of solidarity, next to a drum set featuring African bongos. Stanley Gaye, president of the Liberian Community Association of Dallas-Fort Worth, addressed a crowd of reporters who had pressing questions:

“Do you know the Ebola patient?”

“Where is the patient’s family?”

“Is the community concerned for its image?”

Gaye said the last thing Liberians need is to be stigmatized and that Liberians wanted to “work together with the Dallas community and with the people of the Liberian community to get as much information out about this as possible.”

Closing Borders Is Not The Answer

Health officials have said Duncan showed no sign of illness when he left Liberia, but someone asked whether Liberia’s borders should be closed to keep other infected people from leaving.

One community leader jumped up and took the microphone, eager to respond.

“When you close the borders of a country, you don’t just restrict the movement of people,” local Liberian Pastor Emmanuel Botchway said. “Once you stop travel, you put a stop to trade and commerce. That would be terrible for Liberia.”

Gaye said the Liberian community had met a month ago with officials from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the Dallas area to learn what they could do for relatives suffering from Ebola back home in the impoverished nation, where health care is substandard and even ambulances are scarce. The CDC is responsible for protecting America from health, safety and security threats from disease.

But since Duncan’s diagnosis, Gaye said, the community has not heard from federal, state or local health officials, though the community has tried to reach out.
Medical Supplies Set To Go

Harling Moore, pastor at New Life Fellowship Church, said the Liberian community, which numbers about 10,000 throughout central Texas, has more to worry about than its public image. They are concerned for their countrymen dying in Africa.

“We’ve been in communication with loved ones back home,” he said, adding, “we’re offering advice on how to deal with this disease, and we are sending supplies.”

In the church parking lot, officials pointed to a semi-trailer they said was loaded with medical supplies and was to be sent to two hospitals in Liberia.

If the borders were closed, they said, aid could not get in.

“This is a life-and-death situation,” said Moore, who fled civil war in Liberia and has lived in Dallas for 14 years. “But we are trying to stay positive, encouraging one another and letting the community know that we are possible victims in this situation as well.”

Jimmy Sando, a Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport worker, stood among the community leaders and said, “Every major disease ... known to man starts somewhere, but it doesn’t stay in one place,” he said.

The diseases spread, just like HIV and AIDS, so please don’t point a finger at Liberia, he pleaded.

“This disease has been around since the 1970s. It ... spread to countries like Nigeria and Liberia. You can’t blame Liberians, just like you can’t blame any one nation for AIDS.”

Spreading The Word

Ebola is spread by contact with the bodily fluids of infected people who have symptoms, such as bleeding or vomiting, and a person cannot become infected by airborne transmission.

Botchway said pastors in the nine local Liberian churches would take to their pulpits Sunday to spread the word about the disease. They will implore citizens who might have come in contact with Duncan to go to the hospital and to contact the CDC.

“We will tell them that this is not a disease of shame,” he said. “If you think you might be infected, or if you know someone else, please come forward.”

But don’t even think of returning to your homeland because of mean-spirited comments, Woahloe stressed.
# Ebola hits the U.S.

## Number of Ebola Cases and Deaths as of Sept. 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country / State</th>
<th>Probable / suspected</th>
<th>Confirmed</th>
<th>Total of confirmed and probable / suspected</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Guinea</td>
<td>Cases 207</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>710 deaths 1,157 cases</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths 175</td>
<td>535</td>
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<tr>
<td>B Liberia</td>
<td>Cases 2,769</td>
<td>927</td>
<td>1,998 deaths 3,696 cases</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths 1,108</td>
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<tr>
<td>C Sierra Leone</td>
<td>Cases 228</td>
<td>2,076</td>
<td>622 deaths 2,304 cases</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths 48</td>
<td>574</td>
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<tr>
<td>D Nigeria</td>
<td>Cases 1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8 deaths 20 cases</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths 1</td>
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<td>E Congo</td>
<td>Cases 40</td>
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<td>42 deaths 70 cases</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>F Senegal</td>
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<td>Deaths 0</td>
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<tr>
<td>G U.S.A. - Texas</td>
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<td>1 case</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deaths 0</td>
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[Map showing countries affected and cases](#)

Graphic: Staff  
Source: World Health Organization  
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