225592 - Ruling on travelling from a country where the Ebola virus is widespread

the question

I was on a visit to one of the countries where the Ebola virus is widespread, because I went there during my leave from work to visit my family. I know that in the hadith it says that it is not permissible for a man to go to or leave a country in which the plague is widespread, but I did not refrain from travelling there because I know that there is a procedure for examining travellers before they travel, to make sure that the traveller is free of this disease. After the end of my leave, my boss put pressure on me to go back to work, at the time when this sickness was still widespread and had not yet been eradicated in this country. Is it permissible for me to leave the country, or should I wait without work, until it is announced that this sickness has eradicated in this country?

Summary of answer

Conclusion:

If you are leaving this land in order to go back to work, it
is permissible according to scholarly consensus, because the aim thereof is
not to flee from the epidemic; rather it is travel that is was already
planned and intended for the sake of work.

And Allah knows best.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Ebola is a viral disease that leads to haemorrhagic fever; it results from infection with one of five types of the Ebola virus. It leads to death in between twenty-five and ninety percent of those infected, depending on the type of virus. The symptoms of this disease include: fever, headache, vomiting, diarrhoea, severe fatigue, rash; bleeding from the eyes, nose, mouth and anus; swelling of the genitalia.

The name of the disease – Ebola – is taken from the name of the place where the first outbreak occurred, in Yambuku in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where it appeared in a village on the banks of the Ebola river, so it was named after the river.

This disease is sometimes transmitted to humans from animals, and sometimes from other humans. As for its transmission via animals, it occurs as the result of touching the animal that is infected with Ebola; this includes its limbs, secretions and bodily fluids. Cases of infection via contact with a number of infected animals have been recorded, such as fruit bats, chimpanzees, gorillas, monkeys and deer.

With regard to transmission from humans, that results from direct contact with the blood, secretions or semen of an infected person, or even with his corpse after his death. For more information on this epidemic, please see the following link:

http://goo.gl/GVLS2R

Secondly:

There are hadiths from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that forbid the Muslim to enter a land in which the plague is occurring, and also forbid him to leave a land in which the plague is occurring.

Al-Bukhaari (5739) and Muslim (2219) narrated from ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn ‘Awf (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say: “If you hear that it (the plague) is in a land, do not go there, and if it breaks out in a land where you are, do not leave, fleeing from it.”

Al-Bukhaari (3473) and Muslim (2218) narrated that Usaamah ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “The plague is a calamity (or a punishment) that was sent upon the Children of Israel, or upon those who came before you. If you hear of it in some land, do not go there, and if it breaks out in a land where you are, do not leave, fleeing from it.”

It was said that what is meant by the word taa‘oon (translated here as plague) is a specific disease that is known to the scholars and doctors. It was also said that it refers to any widespread disease (epidemic) that leads to the death of many people.

These hadiths indicate that the prohibition applies specifically to one who leaves the land where the plague or epidemic is occurring, fleeing from it. As for one who leaves for another purpose, such as trade, study or work, the prohibition does not apply to him.

This differentiation was noted by more than one of the scholars; in fact some of them narrated that the scholars were unanimously agreed on that.

An-Nawawi said in Sharh Saheeh Muslim:

Taa‘oon (plague) refers to boils that appear on the body.

As for waba’ (epidemic), al-Khaleel and others said that it refers to the plague. Others said that it refers to any widespread disease. The correct view, as noted by the scholars, is that it is any sickness that affects many people in one part of the land, but not all of it; differs from ordinary diseases in the large number of people affected and in other ways; and where they are all affected by the same kind of sickness, unlike at other times, when people suffer from different kinds of sickness.

These hadiths indicate that it is prohibited to go to the land where the plague is occurring, and to leave that land, fleeing from it.

As for leaving it for a need that arises, there is nothing wrong with that.

The scholars are agreed that it is permissible to leave for work and other purposes, apart from fleeing from it. The evidence for that is the apparent meaning of the hadiths. End quote.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr said in at-Tamheed (21/183):

This indicates that it is permissible to leave at that time, from the place where the plague is occurring, for ordinary travel, if the aim is not to flee from the plague. End quote.

Ibn Muflih said in al-Adaab ash-Shar‘iyyah (3/367):

If the plague breaks out in a land where you are not, then do not go to it. And if you are in that land, do not leave it, because of the famous saheeh report to that effect. What is meant by entering or leaving it is doing so for no reason except to flee from it. Otherwise it is not prohibited. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen said in Sharh Riyadh as-Saaliheen (6/569):

The plague is a lethal epidemic – we seek refuge with Allah. Some of the scholars said that it is a particular type of epidemic, and it refers to sores and boils on the body of the afflicted person… And it was said that taa‘oon (plague) is a word that applies to any kind of epidemic that spreads rapidly, such as cholera and the like. This is more likely to be correct, because even if that is not included in the wording of the hadith, it is included in the meaning. In the event of any epidemic that spreads rapidly, it is not permissible for anyone to travel to the land where this epidemic has broken out, and if it breaks out when you are in that land, then do not leave, fleeing from it.

As for a person leaving that land, not to flee from it, but because he came to that land for a reason and has finished what he went there to do, and wants to return to his own land, there is nothing wrong with him doing so. End quote.

He also said in ash-Sharh al-Mumti‘ (1/110-111): With regard to the plague, is it permissible for a person to leave a land if it breaks out there?

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “do not leave – that is, do not leave

the land where the outbreak has occurred – fleeing from it." So the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) limited the prohibition on leaving to cases where one does so in order to flee from it. But if someone came to that land for some purpose or for business, and has finished what he came there to do, and he wants to go back to his own land, then we do not say: This is prohibited for you. Rather we say: You may leave. End quote.

In Fath al-Baari (10/1990), al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) discussed this matter in more detail, and said that there are three scenarios with regard to leaving a land in which the plague is occurring:

1. When a person leaves in order to flee from it, and not for any other purpose. This is undoubtedly included in the prohibition.

2. When he leaves for a purpose other than fleeing from it, such as work and the like. This is not included in the prohibition, and this is the category concerning the permissibility of which an-Nawawi narrated that there was scholarly consensus.

3. When a person leaves for the purpose of work or otherwise, but adds to that the aim of being safe from the epidemic. The scholars differed concerning this, but al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar stated that the view of 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him) was that it is permissible to leave in this case.

This was the view favoured by Imam al-Bukhaari, as he included a chapter in his Saheeh entitled "One who leaves a land the climate of which does not suit him", in which he quoted the hadith of the 'Arniyyeen, and cited it as evidence for that being permissible. In this hadith it says that some people came to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in Madinah, and declared their Islam, but they fell sick because of the climate of Madinah, as it did not suit them. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed them to drink the milk and urine of camels as a remedy for that, and they went out of the city because those camels were at pasture.

Al-Bukhaari quoted that hadith before quoting the hadith which mentions the prohibition on leaving the land where the plague is occurring, fleeing from it. Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar said,

commenting on that:

With regard to the words “Chapter on One who leaves a land the climate of which does not suit him”, it is as if he was indicating that the hadith that he narrated after that, concerning the prohibition on leaving a land where there is an outbreak of the plague, is not to be understood in terms of its general meaning; rather it is restricted to those who leave, fleeing from it, as we will see below, in sha Allah. End quote.