



Secretary-General's Remarks to the General Assembly on the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa

I thank the General Assembly for convening on such short notice to address the Ebola outbreak at a time of busy preparations for the new session.

We are all aware of the immensity of the suffering in West Africa and the enormity of the challenge. This crisis demands the attention of the entire membership of the United Nations.

We must show solidarity as one United Nations and one global community. We must break through institutional barriers or other hurdles that might impede rapid action.

The General Assembly has a key role to play in showing the world the effective, responsive, caring face of the United Nations.

Excellencies,

Earlier this year, I visited Sierra Leone to mark the closing of the United Nations peacekeeping operation there, and to celebrate the country's remarkable turnaround from years of war and atrocity. In doing so, it showed the value of sustained international engagement and solidarity.

Neighbouring Liberia has also known the depths of conflict and misery. It, too, wrote a new chapter in its history with the help of United Nations peacekeepers and other international support for its own pain-staking efforts.

Guinea, for its part, has achieved inroads against hunger and progress towards some of the other Millennium Development Goals.

The solidarity that made these gains and transformations possible is needed now to preserve that progress and help people who have been thrust into the turmoil and uncertainty of the Ebola outbreak.

A crisis that started as a public health emergency has taken on such wider scope, with significant economic, social, humanitarian, political and security dimensions.

According to the World Health Organization, there are nearly 5,000 cases of Ebola Virus Disease in the region. But WHO also indicates that given shortfalls in reporting and monitoring, this number is likely to be much higher.

More than 2,500 people have died. And as in so many other spheres, women are bearing the brunt of the impact. Seventy per cent of the victims are women, reflecting the fact that it is they who form the bulk of health care workers and who are more likely to care for sick relatives and prepare bodies for

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burial.

The number of cases is doubling every three weeks. The fear of contagion is itself proving to be contagious, disrupting economic activity and the provision of social services. Spill-over effects in the region and beyond are increasingly evident.

As the disease spreads, a truth becomes clear: None of us is insulated from the threat of Ebola; all of us must be part of the response.

Excellencies,

The Governments of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are determined to do whatever they can to address the crisis. They have also written to me, asking the United Nations for assistance and support.

The United Nations is strongly committed to mobilizing the international community and helping a full range of partners do what is needed to respond to this challenge.

The World Health Organization, under the leadership of its Director-General, Dr. Margaret Chan, has developed a Response Road Map and is working with the affected countries to identify the best possible epidemiological ways to address the outbreak – including through a combination of Ebola Treatment Centres and Community Care Centres.

The UN system is providing assistance and expertise.

At the same time, we must do more – much more. There is an urgent need to take international action to the next level.

You have before you my letter outlining the scope of a new United Nations Mission that I have decided to establish.

The United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, or UNMEER, will provide a platform for wide-ranging international efforts. It will have five priorities:

First, to stop the outbreak; Second, to treat the infected; Third, to provide essential services; Fourth, to preserve stability; Fifth, to prevent outbreaks in non-affected countries.

The mission will support national efforts. Reinforcing government leadership will be one of its guiding principles.

The mission will also emphasize community outreach, training and education. Misunderstandings about the disease and how it is transmitted have hindered the response. Local leaders, including traditional and religious leaders, have important roles to play in raising awareness.

This morning I spoke by telephone with His Excellency Mr. John Dramani Mahama, the President of Ghana. He expressed immediate and wholehearted support for the efforts of the United Nations and agreed to host the headquarters of UNMEER in Accra. UNMEER will also have offices in each of the three most affected countries.

President Mahama is also allowing the country's international airport to be used for the vital air bridge. I would like to express my profound gratitude for these contributions.

Many governments and organizations have come forward with impressive contributions of military assets, human resources, financing and supplies.

African countries and the African Union have shown admirable solidarity.

The United States has announced, as we are well aware, that it will take a number of significant steps, including the deployment of 3,000 troops to provide expertise in logistics, training and engineering. I commend President Barack Obama for his leadership.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Government of Cuba for its announcement of plans to send a 165-member team of doctors and nurses to the region. This comes in addition to Cuba's robust medical assistance to Haiti, and is a wonderful expression of global solidarity.

I am also very grateful to the Government of China for its generous support. A 59-member Chinese laboratory team left Beijing for Sierra Leone earlier this week, and will soon be on the ground delivering much-needed care and expertise.

These contributions are important and highly welcome. I hope other Member States, along with the private sector and civil society, will do far more. Our best estimate is that we need a twenty-fold increase in assistance.

Earlier this week, the United Nations outlined a set of critical needs totalling almost \$1 billion over the next six months.

The protection of staff and all health responders must be a top priority in halting transmission of the disease. In order to attract and retain the doctors and medical professionals required at this time, we need to be able to provide emergency medical evacuation should they become infected with Ebola in the conduct of their duties. I call on countries with means to enable us to give these vital assurances.

I also reiterate my appeals to air and shipping companies not to isolate these countries. Travel and border restrictions will not keep the virus from getting out but will keep supplies and health responders from getting in.

Beyond our current focus on the emergency, there is a need to address fundamental gaps in health and other basic services. It is not too soon to initiate a global discussion and to be thinking of new ideas that will allow for more timely action and prevent the next epidemic.

Excellencies,

As each day passes, more people die, many more are infected, and the demands of response and containment become exponentially greater.

To get the crisis under control, all of us will have to work in unorthodox ways, break through barriers, and leverage the best that each of us can bring to bear. Speed is of the essence.

Action by the General Assembly today in adopting the resolution before you will enable the United Nations to quickly increase its capacity to deliver in the affected countries.

The establishment of the UNMEER is just the beginning. We will need to stay engaged, and we will need to reach new heights of cooperation. No single State, and no single organization, can do this alone.

I look forward to your strong and rapid support for the new UN health emergency mission and for the countries and people who have turned to us for help in a moment of critical need.

Thank you.

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