2015 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment

Learning the lessons from the West Africa Ebola Virus Disease outbreak
Sponsors and Organizers: Sierra Leone, USA, WHO

Wednesday 17 June – 12.30-14.30
Room XXIV, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

This is one of the side-events to be convened during the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment, in keeping with this year’s theme: The future of humanitarian affairs: towards greater inclusiveness, coordination, interoperability and effectiveness.

Background and objectives
The Ebola outbreak in West Africa has resulted in over 26,000 infections and claimed more than 11,000 lives, with 10 countries reporting cases across three continents. Substantial progress in limiting the extent and intensity of Ebola transmission has been made in the lead up to the rainy season in West Africa. There are currently between 15 and 30 confirmed cases per week, down from a peak of over 800 in November and an average of 100 in March. The recent announcement of Liberia having reached 42 days since the burial of the last confirmed case is encouraging, but must be viewed in the context of ongoing chains of transmission in Guinea and Sierra Leone. Overall, the progress re-affirms that that the core public health Ebola control interventions of case finding and contact tracing work. However, the task is not finished and the situation remains complex.

The outbreak has disrupted health and educational services, had a devastating impact on the economies of the three most affected countries, contributed to social and political tensions, and rolled back development gains. It has exposed weaknesses of and underinvestment in health systems, demonstrated the fragility of the post-conflict recovery process, and revealed deficiencies in global capacities to respond efficiently to major outbreaks.

The goal of this side event is to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the response to the Ebola outbreak, to identify current priorities for getting to zero cases and staying at zero, and to extract lessons that can assist with the prevention and mitigation of similar events in the future. The international community was initially slow to recognize and respond to the outbreak. By the time that response activities had begun to scale up, the rate of infection was increasing exponentially throughout Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, with the threat of further international spread. The national capacities and traditional global systems for emergency response were not well equipped to deal with this exceptional crisis. The establishment of the United Nations Mission for Emergency Ebola Response and the deployment of international military forces for a public health response were both unprecedented.

Discussion points
Panelists will discuss:
• 1) Challenges and successes in responding to the Ebola outbreak;
• 2) The Collective priorities for getting to zero and staying at zero;
• 3) The central role of communities in getting to zero and in the recovery efforts;
• 4) How investments in health systems contribute to resilience and can prevent future emergencies;
• 5) Opportunities for closer collaboration between the health and the larger humanitarian communities;
• 6) Looking forward: strengthening collective action for emergency health response.

**Intended outcomes/conclusions/recommendations**

The session will identify opportunities to strengthen both national and international preparedness and response capacities.

**Format**

Panel discussion with questions asked by the Co-Chair/Moderator:

I. **Co-Chairs’s short introductory remarks - WHO and USAID: 10min**
   • Mr. Ariel Pablos Mendez, Assistant Administrator for Global Health, USAID
     Or
     Mr. Jeremy Konyndyk, Director of USAID’s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)
   • Dr. Bruce Aylward, Special Representative of the Director-General for Ebola and Assistant-Director General, Emergencies, World Health Organization

II. **Discussion with the Panel, moderated by USAID: 60min (10min per intervention)**

   • **Discussion point 1 (Challenges and successes): MSF**
     Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)
     Or
     Brice de la Vigne - Director of Operations, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

   • **Discussion point 2 (Collective priorities and challenges for getting to zero and staying at zero): WHO**
     Dr. Bruce Aylward, Special Representative of the Director-General for Ebola and Assistant-Director General, Emergencies, World Health Organization

   • **Discussion point 3 (the central role of communities in getting to zero and in the recovery efforts): Unicef**
     Mr. Gianfranco Rotigliano, UNICEF Regional Emergency Coordinator for Ebola
• **Discussion point 4 (collaboration between the health and the larger humanitarian communities)**: *WFP*
  Ms. Denise Brown, Regional Director for West Africa, World Food Programme (WFP)

• **Discussion point 5 (investments in health systems will contribute to resilience)**: *Government of Sierra Leone*
  Ms. Yvette Stevens, Sierra Leone Ambassador to the U.N. Geneva

• **Discussion point 6 (strengthening collective action for emergency health response)**:
  Mr. Claus Sørensen’s, Director-General of the European Commission Directorate-General of Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO)

### III. Questions from the floor to the panel: 50min

### IV. Background Materials

*Sierra Leone Ministry of Health*: http://health.gov.sl/?page_id=583  
*WHO Ebola response*: http://apps.who.int/ebola/  
*MSF Ebola response*: http://www.msf.org/diseases/ebola  
*WFP Ebola response*: http://www.wfp.org/emergencies/ebola  
*http://ec.europa.eu/echo/ebola-in-west-africa_en*  

### V. Contact

*For more information, please contact:*

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