



**Introductory remarks by Mr. Peter Graaff, Acting Special Representative of the UN Secretary General and Head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response
Guinea Bissau end of mission press conference
Bissau airport, 25 June 2015**

Ladies and gentlemen of the press,

I arrived in Guinea Bissau yesterday with the intention of assessing the country's level of preparedness in case Ebola crosses the border. I have since met with Prime Minister Domingos Simões Pereira, the Minister of Health Mrs. Valentina Mendes; I have visited a standby Ebola treatment unit at the Simao Mendes Hospital, and convened with numerous UN and non-UN partners. This morning, I traveled to Quebo to look at prevention and surveillance measures put in place at the Cuntabane Border post adjacent to the Republic of Guinea.

What I have heard and seen in the past two days is very encouraging even if more should be done technically to improve preparedness and response capacity. I am pleased with the engagement of the government and partners in keeping Guinea Bissau shielded from Ebola because the virus is real and is at the doorsteps of Bissau. I am also pleased to see that there is cross-border cooperation between Guinea and Guinea Bissau, to minimize the risk of the virus arriving here.

Indeed, If I am here today as Head of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, It is because the prefecture of Boko in neighboring Republic of Guinea has been registering Ebola cases for the past two months. This calls for heightened vigilance



in Guinea Bissau due to common borders crossed daily by hundreds of travelers and tradesmen.

The Ebola crisis in West Africa is more than one and half years now, but its recent emergence in the area of Boke requires an effective implementation of preparedness and response measures designed by the government of Guinea Bissau with support from the UN system in the country. UNMEER and the entire UN System will continue to support prevention and response efforts in Guinea-Bissau.

In this critical phase national leadership and good coordination are very important, as we have seen in the affected countries. Preventive measures such as cleaning of hands, systematic temperature checks at entry and departure points and in hospitals and various healthcare centers are also essential.

But above all, the role of communities will be the determining factor in preventing Ebola from coming to Guinea Bissau, or from spreading if the virus does appear in the country. The citizens of Guinea Bissau must make sure to observe hygiene measures and seek medical help if they suspect Ebola symptoms such as high fever, vomiting and diarrhea even if these are common to other diseases like malaria. Just because there has not been any Ebola in Guinea Bissau doesn't mean that people should let up surveillance. With the situation in Boke, this is the time to be particularly vigilant.

I know that there has been a lot of preparation and awareness in Guinea Bissau at the height of the Ebola crisis in the region, but after being on alert for a long time and not seeing a single case at home many people in Guinea Bissau are tempted to dismiss the threat. However, the lessons we have learned from the other countries tell us that as long as there is Ebola in the region,



everyone is at risk. The area of Boke that never experienced Ebola cases until the end of April is a case in point and it is very close to here.

As journalists, you can help us spread the word of vigilance and I hope that you will be part of the fight against Ebola like your peers in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

I will now take a few questions.

Thank you.