

Global Ebola Response Coalition Meeting
5 December 2014
Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The Secretary General's Ebola Envoy chaired the ninth meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group on 5 December. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

WHO updated on the **latest epidemiological situation**. We are still seeing a complex picture, perhaps best described as, rather than one outbreak, an amalgam of many smaller outbreaks across the region. This greater granularity helps us understand better the nature of the outbreaks, which can be disguised with an aggregate view. Overall the case incidence is increasing but the pattern of that is not uniform. In Liberia the decrease we have seen over recent weeks is flattening out. In Guinea, the areas driving up the incidence rates are Guinea Forestiere, Conakry and locations on the border with Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, Freetown, Western Areas and areas to the North West are seeing increasing numbers of new cases. There has been a worrying increase in health care worker infections in last the few weeks.

The Chair provided a readout following his **recent visit to the region**. There are thousands of groups working with total intensity to respond to the outbreak, confronting together the many challenges they face. A big change is occurring in Liberia and Eastern Sierra Leone, demonstrating that when applied effectively, the strategy works. There is real evidence of the national Governments, from the highest level, now fully implicated in the response, with much stronger national coordination and ownership. Our understanding of the outbreak is improving, helped by the frame of reference shifting to see many mini-outbreaks rather than one, all at various stages of intensity and advancement. Although overall the outbreak may be cooling, there remain areas of intense heat, e.g in Western Sierra Leone and parts of Guinea, with these areas bringing anxiety they can become Ebola centrifuges for future cases. There is still a long way to go to get on the trajectory to success but it is clear that a stronger district focus, greater granular and understanding of the outbreak, and more integrated responses are key. There are important discussions around the AU deployment of international responders to the region, through which we can identify ways to facilitate their ease of entry. There is increasing recognition of the important role of the Secretary General's Ebola Multi Partner Trust Fund, as a tool to support the collective effort, and fund areas where there were currently gaps, including down to the district levels; the Fund fits squarely with the ethos of the GERC, to work collaboratively together within a commonly understood strategic approach.

In terms of country specific conclusions from the visit: in Guinea, there is a need to get active and to do so in an integrated way, at Prefecture, County and District level. We are seeing improving coordination and cooperation, and a sense of a surging response. In Sierra Leone, the big challenges are in Port Loko and Western Areas. There is a concern these areas will reseed the outbreak in the East. Although the treatment capacity is increasing very quickly, with new ETCs and CCCs coming on

stream, not all of those infected are being isolated. In Liberia, the situation is slightly stalled with rising levels of new cases and there is anxiety about this. In Mali, all partners are working hard to make sure new cases are prevented and to be prepared should they appear.

In terms of the **response**, overall leadership and flexibility remain critical. District level activity is increasing but there is a need to maintain focus on that. Good partnership working and confronting the challenges is dependent on the generation and application of robust data. Identifying examples of good practice and ways to share those is improving and is to be further encouraged, including to enhance working between the most affected countries e.g. between Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is important to embrace the role of survivors and identify a clear role for them in the response. There is a need to consider deployment of negotiation teams in advance of social mobilisation teams in areas where there is the risk of instability around Ebola related activities. A meeting of Ebola task force responders will happen under EU auspices on 12 December: this is an important forum to identify and discuss needs and funding gaps.

A number of continuing **challenges** were identified. It is important to stay focused on the challenges and not take our foot off the pedal in response to signs of progress. It is felt there continue to be shortages in ambulance services and access to other transport facilities. We still need more capacity for case management. Support to national non-Ebola health systems remains a critical need, including a more balanced message on this issue to the wider populations. Holding centres are a continuing source of concern, given the time it can take to process laboratory tests. Stronger support for nutrition and food security is important, as are ways to address issues of stigma, education for children in affected locations, and the broader needs of women and girls.

On **communications**, the Chair introduced the Information Centre on Ebola as an important resource to support the work of the Coalition. The Centre's goal is to provide insights to improve the explanations and understandings of the Ebola response effort. The current focus is on producing an "Outlook" report, capturing what has been done in 2014 and looking ahead to what will be done in 2015. This would be taken forward in collaboration with Coalition colleagues. The Centre is also developing a website as a place where all information is held and which is publicly accessible. A meeting of communications staff from Coalition partners will happen on 10 December and catalyse the Centre to further action. Coalition participants welcomed the initiative to set up the Centre. It will be important to bring consistency in the messaging, and provide an important mechanism to promote core messages e.g. around the need to avoid complacency. It will help ensure the necessary rigour is maintained in transmitting robust and clear messages.

In summary, the Chair thanked all for their participation. He noted the importance of: a more flexible response to needs at district level; an integrated approach, linking the various elements of the response; building trust with local communities; finance to reach the local level; better and coordinated data, enabling consistent and

credible communications; the aim for zero transmission not residual transmission; continuing to empower existing actors including local decision makers; the AU's plans for deployment of international responders; the role of the Trust Fund In supporting the Coalition's efforts; responding to concerns about stigma and embracing the role of survivors; progress on the capacity for testing and enhanced transport; non-Ebola care alongside the need for Ebola care; and the challenge of Mali. He concluded that it is important to continue to challenge ourselves, as we confront the wider challenges ahead.

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