

Global Ebola Response Coalition Meeting
30 January 2015
Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The sixteenth meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group took place on 30 January. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

2. The meeting discussed the current **epidemiological situation**. The cumulative number of cases of Ebola is now 22,124, with 8,765 reported deaths. The total number of new cases has now been declining for 5 consecutive weeks. Last week (to 27 January 2015) saw a total of under 100 new cases across the three countries, for the first time since June 2014. The majority of new cases (65) were in Sierra Leone, with 30 in Guinea. In Liberia there were only 4 reported new cases. Although the general trend is downwards, there are several obstacles that will impede a continued decline to zero. In Guinea new cases have been reported in prefectures (e.g. Mali), where up until now cases have not been reported. The wide dispersion of Ebola cases across Guinea continues, as do incidences of reticence from people and communities to engage in the response. In Sierra Leone, new cases have been found in districts and parts of the country (e.g. Kenema) which had previously not reported cases for some weeks. Concerns were also raised about possible under reporting in Sierra Leone.

3. In all three countries new cases are being seen which were not previously registered as contacts of people with Ebola i.e. from unidentified chains of transmission. New health care worker infections in Liberia raise concerns about infection prevention and control. Cases of Ebola which have been diagnosed post-mortem are also a cause for concern. There are continuing instances of unsafe burials. The movement of the virus across large distances (e.g. from Monrovia to Mali Prefecture in Guinea) is a significant issue that needs to be recognised and responded to.

4. In terms of **the response**, it was noted that Ebola should not be talked about in the past tense. There is still a significant challenge in the affected countries and much more effort needed to reach zero. The reducing financial resources available to the response are already affecting the ability of the response to stay in step with the virus. There are two areas where strengthened action is needed: i) on cross-border surveillance and ii) on social mobilisation and health promotion activities. UNMEER is focused on both; deployment of UNMEER staff to the districts continues.

5. Access to non-Ebola services remains inadequate across the three countries e.g. access to hospital care in Monrovia. Infection of health workers with Ebola continues, with particular concerns around information, training and equipment. The impending arrival of the rainy season will make the response more complicated. Working in the communities to reduce latent resistance is an important part of the phase 2 response.

6. Strong political leadership remains critical: the interest from the affected countries to normalise their situations needs to be managed, to ensure momentum towards zero is maintained. It will be important to identify what extra steps or additional measures are needed to adapt our response to the challenges ahead. It needs to be clear that the strategy is to act intensively now, with a view to stopping the epidemic as quickly as possible. The right balance needs to be found between focusing on getting to zero and the work on longer term recovery. Getting to zero will require a continuation of the increase in capacity at district level.

7. The series of important **Ebola related international events** in the first few months of 2015 was discussed. In the margins of this week's AU Summit, a special session on Ebola took place on 29 January, which was co-chaired by the UN and AU. This looked at the current situation and the future strategy, and stressed the high levels of commitment needed to reach zero. The meeting was helpful in clarifying a number of issues around the role of the AU in the response. Two particular areas of AU/UN partnership were identified by the AU Chairperson. Firstly: cross-border activity as a key component of the passage to zero and where the role of the Mano River Union, ECOWAS and the AU itself was important. Secondly: longer term recovery, particularly in reinforcing health systems, where the Economic Commission for Africa has a key role to play. An Ebola Fund was launched at the meeting, which was a partnership with the private sector and had already raised \$32m.

8. A meeting to discuss the Ebola Recovery Assessment (ERA) took place in New York on 29 January, in the margins of the Executive Board of UNDP. This took the form of a briefing for Member States. Partners involved in the ERA were also present, from the World Bank, EU and AfDB. The main purpose was to brief on preliminary findings from the Assessment, following a recent mission to the region. Sharing of this work was strongly encouraged during the Coalition meeting. Issues covered in the findings include: the absence of strong and robust institutions in the countries; relationships between societies and their Governments; the kind of recovery approach needed in order to "build back better"; and the importance of national ownership and leadership. The private sector was identified as a key stakeholder in the recovery process and their role in that should be facilitated.

9. The EU updated on planning for the 3 March Conference in Brussels. It would be co-chaired by the EU, the three Presidents of the affected countries, the African Union and the UN. The Conference would examine the ongoing response and progress to zero; as well as looking ahead to the recovery, which would consider the results of the ERA. The outcome would be a joint statement by the Co-Chairs on maintaining commitment and next steps.

10. We discussed the Executive Board Special Session (EBSS) on Ebola which was held on 25 January. It covered two issues: getting to zero; and establishing effective systems to manage crises of this kind in the future. On the first there were strong endorsements of the proposed strategy contained in the Getting to Zero paper shared in advance of the EBSS. Cross border work, the importance of an effective vaccine and safe reactivation of services were identified as key issues. The Executive

Board has charged the Director General of WHO to establish a Special Representative position to drive the public health aspect of the response. On the future and the establishment of effective systems, there was broad consensus on the need for deep reform and sweeping change across WHO to make it fit for purpose for the third part of its mandate on, emergency operations (in addition to its technical and normative roles). Main areas of reform proposed by the Executive Board were on: new systems for human resources management, procurement, information technology etc; structures to bring hazard response functions together, to enable more streamlined responses to major crises, including the processes to appoint staff in key areas; and capacities around human resources, emergency financing and logistics. In terms of immediate next steps, the focus will be on getting to zero; there will also be a rapid interim assessment undertaken by a panel of experts identified by the Director General, who will bring a report to the World Health Assembly in May, with recommendations for restructure and reform. The final report of the EBSS is available on the WHO website.

11. The World Economic Forum in Davos (21 -24 January 2015) included important discussions on issues of relevance to Ebola, particularly on the importance of creating mechanisms to optimise the role of the private sector and foundations in the response. Other issues discussed included data interchangeability, staffing rosters, better coordination, streamlined financing mechanisms, and more sophisticated ways to support social mobilisation.

12. The Special Envoy's team thanked the Coalition for responses to the **online survey** (<http://esurveydesigns.com/wix/p44771135.aspx>), and advised those who had not yet responded, that the survey would close next week. A summary of conclusions from the survey would follow. The emerging conclusion was that the forum was a valuable one and there was strong endorsement of the content and structure of the meeting.
