

Global Ebola Response Coalition Meeting
7 November 2014
Issues Discussed and Next Steps

The Secretary General's Ebola Envoy chaired the fifth meeting of the Global Ebola Response Coalition Core Group on 7 November. The main points covered in the meeting follow.

The **latest epidemiological pattern**, particularly in Liberia, was attracting much interest. Transmission of the virus is slowing in some areas, and the outbreak is expanding in a linear rather than an exponential fashion. This is what was expected as communities mobilize and take action to protect themselves, and national governments – with the support of international partners - increase their responses. However, the overall state of the outbreak continues to cause concern with continued and widespread transmission, associated – in some locations – with extensive circulation of the virus.

The **signs of progress** in the last week were described. The first is an expansion in capacity for treating people with Ebola and enabling them to access care, with the opening of the treatment facility in Kerry Town, Sierra Leone, operated with support from the UK, and of the new facility in Monrovia operated with support from the US. Second: the proportion of burials that are safe has rapidly improved, especially in Liberia: the numbers of volunteers and teams supporting this effort were increasingly significantly. Third: people's behaviour - at community level - is changing, especially with regard to avoiding physical contact with persons who are sick or have died. This is having an influence on the spread of the virus.

The **status of the response** was discussed: there are suggestions that the response is catching up with the outbreak in some geographies. Clarity of message remains important: the outbreak is not under control until all transmission chains are defined and tracked in all places, and action is taken to support and treat people who are in contact with those who are infected and are at risk of disease. Then it will be possible for the number of persons who are infected by each new case to approach zero and the outbreak will end. Until then, the posture of the response must be one of persistence, vigilance and readiness to respond to new challenges.

Challenges remain: the changing pattern of disease means that responses must focus on what is happening in specific locations. This implies an urgent need for establishment of community care centres and for greater capacity to implement targeted actions at district/ county/ prefecture levels in response to good epidemiological analysis.

The group discussed the **implementation of support to communities and Governments** so that they are better able to respond. Discussion was based on the UNMEER Operational Framework and the outcomes of the October 17th Planning Conference in Accra. The Operational Framework serves as an adaptable framework

that can respond to specific situations at local levels with the phasing and scale of the response constantly adjusted in the light of epidemiological changes.

Participants sought more information about **the UN's Ebola response**, and about the extent of collaboration between the UN and both NGOs and civil society groups. It was indicated that *UNMEER incorporates all UN system actions in support of the Emergency Ebola Response in the most affected countries*. UNMEER stressed three priorities moving forward: to ensure crisis management capacity at district levels; to have better capacity for analysing data and interpreting information at local level; and to remain agile and responsive to changing outbreak patterns.

Participants commented on the need for **strong and adaptable responses with adequate capacity and distribution of treatment centres, safe burials, effective contact tracing and community mobilization**. Participants stressed the need for frequent sharing of information and feedback on local level progress, to ensure efficient support for national responses and to avoid overlapping efforts. There were suggestions that means for coordinating implementation could better take account of what NGOs and the private sector were able to contribute. It was agreed that operational coordination and alignment should be undertaken within the countries.

Several participants indicated a wish to know more about the UN system's **contributions at local level**: they asked about its support to information and crisis management, and coordination, in districts, counties and prefectures. UNMEER will be deploying Field Crisis Managers and Information Management Officers to 39 districts in the first instance, with further deployments as necessary. Of these 18 have been recruited and six will be in position very shortly. WHO had increased from 155 to 270 locally-based staff in the last 30 days; that number is set to double again in the next 30 days.

The Chair outlined the critical role of **credible, effective and unambiguous communications** in the Ebola response: the changing nature of the outbreak in some areas and the need to encourage persistent efforts, means this is not an easy task. Members of the Coalition see this as a priority and the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the MDGs is now contributing to the Coalition's communications capacity. An Ebola Information Centre is being established in order to serve the needs of Coalition members. The staff of the Centre will also consider how best to communicate about longer-term recovery needs - including the revitalization of health systems. It will take account of the contributions of civil society groups to messaging with a particular focus on ensuring that data and projections are carefully presented and interpreted.

The Chair updated the group on the state of **finances for the Ebola outbreak**, identifying the key components of the financing picture and the progress that has been made in securing funding.

In **Summary**, the Chair highlighted key issues as: the complicated epidemiological situation, with a variegated picture; the importance to embrace and better reflect

the important role of NGOs; the need for clarity on the deployment and contribution of different parts of the UN system, and an understanding of the unique nature of the UN response; the particular needs in Guinea that were expressed by participants; the importance of careful analysis of the numbers and trends – particularly data on the epidemiology of the response; the introduction of an Ebola Information Centre for use by the Coalition to enhance immediate and long term messaging; greater attention on the role of the private sector; and the importance of now reflecting on positive aspects of the response following a very challenging period when the news has generally been less positive.

Key **next steps** will be to focus on the contributions of NGOs and businesses, and to establish greater understanding of how different entities (especially those within the UN system) will increase the support they offer at local level.

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