

**ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment
17 June 2015, Geneva**

**Remarks by Dr. David Nabarro
Special Envoy on Ebola**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to acknowledge sitting next to me, the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, His Excellency Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Vice-President of ECOSOC and also hearing on the video from María Emma Mejía Vélez, Permanent Representative of Columbia and Vice-President of ECOSOC.

It is a privilege and honour to be here, joining you and also following Mr. Marah, Minister of Finance of Sierra Leone and David McLachlan-Karr, the Resident Coordinator.

Minister Marah and David McLachlan-Karr have shared with you what really was a horror story and I think it is important to spend a few moments reflecting on how extraordinary the tragedy for West Africa has been. With around 11,000 people dying and nearly 30,000 people known to have been infected with this disease, it is still not over. We are still together, fighting Ebola in parts of Sierra Leone and in Guinea. That does mean that we are still very much engaged in the response.

For me, having this panel today is also an opportunity to honour those who have died, not only people infected by the disease but also as Minister Marah said, the many health works - the hundreds of health workers - who perished while trying to serve their people.

It has been a massive shock and still is. What you have also heard is that the people of West Africa have grown in strength as they responded, and they have been supported by their governments, by their faith groups, by their community organizations and by the international system, to be able to cope with the impact of the disease and to recover.

For many, there have been periods of despair and mistrust as they could not understand what was happening. They didn't know about this disease and they wondered what they had done wrong that the spirits came and punished them in

this way. Because this illness has affected people over a period of more than one year, in an area that is bigger than the size of the United Kingdom and also almost as big as France, it has moved from place to place. It has not stayed in one community which means people have never quite known when they were going to be affected and there were times when communities thought they would be completely wiped out by the disease. As the Minister and the Resident Coordinator have said, health systems, education services, businesses, markets and of course trade and the economy of their nation and of other nations were badly affected.

When response came, it was huge, it was generous and it involved thousands of people, but coordinating it and making sure everybody worked together has been a huge challenge. I congratulate the Government and the people of Sierra Leone for the way in which they received outside assistance and served the Coordinator.

One of the two key messages I would like you to take away is that the handling of this outbreak has been led by the people in the countries of West Africa. The presidents and their governments have taken the lead.

We have referred to President Koroma of Sierra Leone, every week travelling to meet his paramount chiefs, 149 of them around the country, to rally them to bring their communities together to change the way in which they behave to reduce the risk of disease and to respond to it. Unless people are involved in the response to a disease, that disease can never be controlled and President Koroma and his Government and his people showed how to do it.

It has not just been the President of Sierra Leone, we pay tribute to President Jonhson Sirleaf of Liberia, President Alpha Condé of Guinea, President Keïta of Mali, President Macky Sall of Senegal and the President of Nigeria, who have been involved either in dealing with the outbreak or helping their countries to stay strong in the face of disease.

The second point I would like us to remember is that the Ebola outbreak has been a long running crisis with communities affected by the disease in one set of villages and then communities recovering from the disease in another set of villages, often only a few kilometres apart from each other. Recovery and response have moved ahead together and indeed the recovery has been part of the response, helping communities to be resilient.

My last point is simply to say that, as our two previous panellists have said, this kind of public health crisis is going to recur, will recur and is recurring. It is

important that, as a global community, we stick by nations and help them to remain resilient in the face of health crisis, to build back better systems so that these kinds of tragedies will not strike again.

On behalf of all of us, I would like once again to thank the Minister and the Resident Coordinator for what they do every day, every week, every month. It has been more than a year and I know that they have barely had a day off since the outbreak started because the response has been led from within communities in the countries.

Recovery at the same time as the response: governments leading and most importantly, communities owning.

Thank you.

Video-on-demand of the segment: <http://webtv.un.org/search/transition-from-relief-to-development-am-session-ecosoc-humanitarian-affairs-segment-2015/4301850572001?term=ECOSOC#full-text>