

United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) Weekly Situational Analysis – 2 November 2014

1. The spread of Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) continues, with the reported death toll nearing 5,000. A total of 13,567 confirmed, probable, and suspected cases of EVD have been reported in six affected countries (Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Spain, and the United States of America) and two previously affected countries (Nigeria, Senegal), according to the latest figures from the World Health Organization (WHO). There have been 4,951 reported deaths.
2. There is some indication that the spread of EVD may be slowing in Liberia. Speaking on reported drop in the growth of new cases, WHO Assistant Director General Dr. Bruce Aylward noted that there had been a drop in the number of burials in Liberia and no increases in laboratory-confirmed cases. He did caution that it was premature to draw conclusions, and partner organizations including MSF have also been quick to warn that the outbreak is by no means under control, and that the global effort still needs to be accelerated. The Africa Governance Initiative warned over the weekend that in rural Sierra Leone, the virus is spreading nine times quicker now than it did two months ago.
3. A positive signal was the announcement that Switzerland has approved the testing of an experimental EVD vaccine from GlaxoSmithKline on 120 healthy volunteers, some of whom will be travelling to West Africa as medical staff. In an effort to reduce strain on the health services of the affected countries, UNICEF announced that it is re-activating essential immunization efforts to curb vaccine-preventable diseases, so that as much attention as possible can be directed towards EVD.
4. There was much international attention this week for the visit of US Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power to the region. During her trip, Ambassador Power drew attention to the fact that many governments could be doing more to halt the spread of EVD, in West Africa. World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim announced an additional \$100 million funding in its EVD crisis response specifically allocated to aiding the deployment of foreign medical teams to the three worst-affected countries.
5. Several more countries including Australia and Canada announced visa or travel restrictions for people from the affected countries, despite statements from many, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, that such policies will only be detrimental to getting the EVD outbreak under control. Similarly, the Secretary-General has stated that health workers should not be subjected to restrictions that are not based on science upon their return from the affected countries. In the US, the health worker who was the first to be quarantined under new rules introduced in New York and New Jersey last week, won her court case over her imposed quarantine on Friday. The judge ruled that she could not be quarantined because she did not show any symptoms of EVD, and that she would be free to go wherever she wants provided that she is monitored daily for symptoms of EVD.
6. EVD survivors and health workers in the affected countries regularly report being shunned by their communities. While some EVD survivors have been branded as witches for surviving the disease, members of burial teams have faced calls for eviction from their homes. The latter is all the more worrying as a study by the Yale School of Public Health this week found that the greatest impact in terms of the EVD response would come from ensuring safe burials: if transmission via burial practices were eliminated, it is assessed that the secondary infection rate would drop below one per EVD case.
7. UNMEER continues to scale up its response, with all in-country staging areas, main logistics hubs (in or near the capital) and 8 out of 12 Forward Logistics Bases are now operational. Reconnaissance missions are ongoing to survey possible aircraft landing zones (7 in Sierra Leone and 3 in Guinea) to allow rotary and fixed wing aircraft to increasingly be used in-country. Two German air force C-160 aircraft have already airlifted over 109 tonnes of cargo to the affected countries since 16 October. Over the same period, WHO provided 400,000 sets of personal protective equipment: 200,000 to Liberia, 150,000 to Sierra Leone, and 50,000 to Guinea.