

# *Ebola: Danger on Humanity*

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Speech of Dr Luis Gomes Sambo, WHO Regional Director for Africa at the Emergency Ministerial Meeting on Ebola Outbreak in West Africa

Dr Sherry Ayithey, Honorable Minister of Health of Ghana

Honorable Ministers of Health

Distinguished Representatives and delegates of Member-States

Excellences Ambassadors and Heads of Cooperation Agencies

Dear DrKeiji Fukuda – Assistant Director General of WHO

Dear Colleagues

Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the World Health Organization, I would like to express my gratitude to the President of the Republic, the Government and the People of Ghana for accepting to host at short notice this emergency ministerial meeting on the current Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

I thank the Honorable Ministers, country delegates and representatives of partner agencies for accepting to attend this meeting. Your presence reflects our collective concern and determination to rapidly interrupt the transmission of Ebola virus that has hit three countries in West Africa.

Honorable Ministers

Distinguished participants

The Ebola virus first struck human beings in 1976 in Yambuku, a village in the Democratic Republic of Congo, along the river Ebola. Since then, more than 20 Ebola outbreaks have occurred mainly in East and

Central African countries.

In March 2014 Guinea notified WHO about cases of Ebola virus Disease. The cases were initially confined to rural Guinea with the epicenter being Gueckedou. What started as a rural outbreak has now spread to Conakry the capital of Guinea as well as cross border spread into Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The ongoing Ebola outbreak is the largest reported to date in terms of number of cases, deaths and geographical spread; and for the first time the Ebola virus is circulating in both urban and rural communities. The current trend of this epidemic and the potential risk of cross-border and international spread constitute a public health matter of grave concern.

As of 1st July 2014, the cumulative total of 750 cases and 455 deaths has been reported in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The impact of this outbreak has been enormous in terms of loss of human lives and negative socio economic effects.

Health Workers have been disproportionately affected, with over 60 cases and 32 deaths reported amongst this group.

I would like at this moment to pay tribute to the health workers that gave their lives to save patients affected by Ebola Virus Disease; I also express my deepest sympathy and condolences to all victims and affected families.

Honorable Ministers

Distinguished participants

The continuing spread of the Ebola virus during this outbreak is in great extent associated with some cultural practices and traditional beliefs which are contrary to recommended public health preventive measures. In addition, the extensive movement of people within and across borders has facilitated rapid spread of the infection across and within the three countries.

The current Ebola outbreak has the potential to spread outside the affected countries and beyond the region if urgent and relevant containing measures are not put in place. We need to improve communication between the Governments, partners and communities in order to generate reliable evidence for implementation of effective and relevant actions.

Honorable Ministers

Distinguished participants

The World Health Organization has convened this urgent meeting to provide an update on the epidemic and to share experiences from countries that have faced similar outbreaks in the past. The meeting will also provide the opportunity to develop a more coordinated response strategy and call for stronger national leadership and international partnership. At the end of the meeting we expect to agree on a single inter-country strategy, which will galvanize key actors, bring together expertise and mobilize resources for accelerated actions to combat the epidemic.

Decisions taken at this meeting should facilitate the operations in the three affected countries and rapidly interrupt the transmission of the Ebola virus. Finally we hope to discuss ways of preventing further epidemics; and the need to undertake research to address the knowledge gap in relation to the natural history of the Ebola Virus Disease, the technology for treatment and more relevant preventive methods.

To the Honorable Ministers of Health of the affected countries I would like to urge you to leave no stone unturned, in your efforts towards containment of the outbreak. Specifically, your leadership is critical in ensuring that preventive and containment measures are effectively implemented in your countries. To this end, I would like to stress the need to redeploy human resources and reallocate funds to facilitate operations in affected communities. Community, religious and opinion leaders need to be informed, involved and engaged to be at the forefront of the response efforts.

To the Ministers of Health of neighboring countries, you should strengthen disease surveillance and increase investment in epidemic preparedness. Effective measures to avert cross-border transmission of infections should be established in line with the requirements of International Health Regulations (IHR 2005).

I would like to remind all Member States in our Region to continue working on strengthening the IHR core capacities namely: legislation, coordination and communication, surveillance, response, preparedness, risk communication, Human Resource capacity, laboratories, entry points, zoonotic event detection, food safety, chemical and radio nuclear event in line with their international commitments.

Following our assessment of the ongoing epidemic, we realize the need to put more emphasis on: active disease surveillance, laboratory capacity, infection control, social mobilization and communication; and management of logistics and finance.

Honorable Ministers

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I am very pleased that WHO is participating to this meeting with the Assistant Director General in charge of Health Security and the Environment, the Director in Charge of Diseases Control in Africa, a team of experts and WHO Representatives of West African countries.

Finally, I would like on behalf of the Director General of WHO Dr Margaret Chan to thank all of you for your positive response to the call of this meeting. I would like to again thank the Ministers of Health, the different experts and partners who travelled all this way to join the meeting. To the Honorable Minister of Health for Ghana thank you for facilitating and providing support in the organization of this meeting.

I am confident that the outcome of this meeting will lead to the adoption a strategy for accelerated response to contain the Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

This is a matter of concern to all of us: Governments, partners and communities. We should act together to overcome it!

Thank you for your attention.

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