



Remarks at a press conference: Cuban government announces substantial support to WHO Ebola response

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12 September 2014

Good morning to the members of the media.

Thank you for coming.

The Ebola outbreak that is ravaging parts of west Africa is the largest, most severe, and most complex in the nearly four-decade history of this disease.

This is Ebola Zaire, the most deadly in the Ebola family of viruses. This is a dreaded virus that is highly contagious, but under only two very specific settings.

First, during care of patients at home by family members or in hospital settings without proper protection against infection. Second, during certain traditional burial practices that involve close contact with a highly infectious corpse.

In the 3 hardest-hit countries, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the number of new cases is moving far faster than the capacity to manage them in Ebola-specific treatment centres.

In Liberia, for example, an Ebola treatment facility, set up jointly by WHO and the Ministry of Health, was recently established to manage 30 patients. It had more than 70 patients the day it opened.

Today, Liberia has not one single bed available for the treatment of an Ebola patient anywhere in the entire country.

Our response is running short on nearly everything, from personal protective equipment, to body bags, to mobile laboratories, to isolation wards.

But the thing we need most of all is people, health care workers. The right people. The right specialists. And specialists who are appropriately trained, and know how to keep themselves safe.

This is vitally important to stop transmission of the Ebola virus. Money and materials are important, but those two things alone cannot stop Ebola virus transmission.

Human resources are clearly our most important need. We need most especially compassionate doctors and nurses, who will know how to comfort patients despite the barriers of wearing PPE and working under very demanding conditions.

Cuba is world-famous for its ability to train outstanding doctors and nurses.

It is world-famous for its generosity and spirit of solidarity in supporting other countries along the route to progress.

Mr Ban-Ki Moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and I separately talked to Cuba's leaders, including, of course, his Excellency President Raoul Castro and Minister Morales, Cuba's Minister of Health.

We urged them to provide support in the fight against Ebola in West Africa.

I'm extremely pleased that Minister Morales traveled to Geneva yesterday.

We held very intensive discussions and meetings and agreed on concrete actions to move forward with Cuba's contribution to the fight against Ebola in west Africa.

I thank the many countries that have already been providing support to WHO and also to other UN agencies, such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme, especially for their support to the three hardest-hit countries.

But we need more of this kind of support. We need a surge of at least three to four times to catch up with the outbreaks that are moving very fast in these three countries.

I hope the announcement today by the Cuban government will stimulate more countries to surge their support.

Thank you very much.

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