



DÓCHAS

The Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations

22 October 2014

Briefing Statement on the Ebola Outbreak:

Irish NGOs call for urgent scaling up of international mobilisation in West Africa

The current outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease in the West African countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia is the largest and longest the world has seen since the disease was first identified in 1976, with the number of deaths now over 4,500. Beyond being a medical and humanitarian crisis, the outbreak threatens the social, economic and political fibre of Sierra Leone and Liberia particularly. A limited number of cases have also been detected in international communities, and the crisis has now become a global concern.

The three countries in West Africa which are most affected are responding as best they can but they are overwhelmed by the scale and nature of the multiple problems the outbreak presents, despite the around the clock efforts of medical and public health staff, community volunteers and missionaries.

Experienced Irish agencies offer humanitarian expertise on the ground

Ireland's humanitarian agencies and experienced aid workers are on the ground in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, supporting the efforts of governments, partners and thousands of frontline staff and volunteers to tackle the crisis. Irish NGOs are involved in addressing the most urgent medical, logistics and public health issues. At the same time, they are helping to tackle complex related problems around water and sanitation, food and nutrition, malaria prevention and treatment, child protection and stigma.

However the scale of the response so far, from Ireland and the international community, it is just not sufficient to stem the disease and pave the way for recovery.

The economic and social toll of the crisis is immeasurable, as inflation, supply shortages and curfews devastate communities. Farming co-operatives and businesses cannot function, schools are closed, health centres are overwhelmed and capacity to deal with medical ailments other than Ebola is depleted.

Irish humanitarian aid agencies call for massive and rapid scaling up of international effort

Observing the dire humanitarian needs on the ground and recognising the absolute requirement to bring the disease under control as quickly as possible, Irish humanitarian agencies are now calling for a massive and rapid scaling-up of the assistance being provided by the international community.

The international community needs to move considerably faster than usual if it is to 'get out ahead' of this rapidly-moving epidemic.

The best way to ensure that Ebola does not break out to a wider population is for the international community to summon the political will, translate that will into tangible and

appropriate resources on the ground, and tackle immediately those logistical and coordination blockages which are hampering effective action.

The United Nations has called for a massive social mobilisation of the international community and has set up the first ever UN emergency health mission, the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) as a coordinating body for the crisis. The UN has also spelled out in mid-October that a global response more than 20 times greater than has been seen so far is required to get the outbreak under control quickly – before the virus spreads exponentially. Donors have pledged about a quarter of the US \$1 billion needed to address the crisis, however still less of this has actually been delivered.

The response must address all aspects of the current crisis (immediate, medium- and long-term) in a holistic way, rather than focusing just on the medical or disease dimension, so that responses also address serious gender impacts, revitalising the wider health system, food security, protection, education and livelihood issues.

Irish humanitarian agencies are calling on Ireland and fellow European Union countries to:

1. **Convey clear and balanced information about the Ebola outbreak**, its transmission and its low risk of import, to minimise panic and mitigate the risk of stigma
2. **Pledge significantly more funds**, and disburse them in flexible ways within the next two weeks so that aid agencies, including NGOs, can react quickly and effectively;
3. European leaders, at the High Level EU Summit meeting in Brussels on 23-24 October, must make more resources available to **facilitate increased capacity** (both civilian and military) in areas like medical response, logistics, transport, water and sanitation, and crucially, medevac solutions;
4. **Provide for the deployment of trained medical and public health workers** in whatever ways they can, remove obstacles to their travel, and ensure that they are trained, equipped and supported to ensure their own good health;
5. **Build effective community mobilisation in the countries affected**, including thorough support for local media, community groups and associations, in order to reduce transmission and to dispel rumors and misunderstanding about Ebola.

The lives and health of tens of thousands of people, the hard-won economic and health gains of millions more, and the future possibilities for this sub-region of West Africa depend on the world not letting the crisis escalate when we have the knowledge, tools and resources to stop it.

For more information about the how Irish humanitarian agencies are responding, and information on the crisis itself, as well as information as to how the public can help, please visit the Dóchas humanitarian information portal www.howyoucanhelp.ie

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Notes (to the Editor for media)

- Dóchas is the Irish Association of Non-Governmental Development Organisations. It provides a forum for consultation and cooperation between its members, and a platform for them to speak with a single voice on development issues. For more information, visit: www.dochas.ie
- Dóchas membership is comprised of 61 overseas development and global justice organisations. A list of Dóchas members can be found at <http://www.dochas.ie/membership/our-members/>
- The howyoucanhelp.ie information portal was set up to provide the Irish public with information on how they can help in times of a humanitarian crisis. It lists the emergencies where Irish NGOs are currently working
- Clear information on Ebola and its transmission can be found at: <http://www.hpsc.ie/AZ/Vectorborne/ViralHaemorrhagicFever/Ebola/EbolaInformationfortheGeneralPublic/FrequentlyAskedQuestions/File,14831,en.pdf> and <http://www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/messages/en/>
- Information on UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) can be found at: <http://www.un.org/ebolareponse/mission.shtml>
- Updated statistics on Ebola can be found at: <http://www.un.org/ebolareponse/data.shtml>