

New York

22 December 2014

## Secretary-General's press encounter on Ebola (full transcript)

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to see you.

I have just convened a UN system-wide meeting on the response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa. Having just returned from the region yesterday, I wanted to share my observations with our principal leaders of the Organization and make sure that the UN response is a rapid, effective and comprehensive one.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Ebola is a vicious killer. I went to the region to show solidarity and to thank the courageous health workers who have inspired the world.

In my talks with the Presidents of Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Mali, I thanked them for their leadership and stressed the need for continued vigilance.

I also want to express my great admiration to Dr. Margaret Chan, the Director General of the World Health Organization and Dr. David Nabarro, my Special Envoy, and Mr. Anthony Banbury, Special Representative and head of UNMEER, who all joined me on this trip.

I met with international, national and civil society partners and thanked them for being part of a remarkable global mobilization of support. I also had a chance to personally thank UN personnel who are doing such valuable work on the ground, risking even their own safety and security, including those serving in UNMEER. I also spent time with local doctors and others who are the cornerstone of the response to Ebola.

I had an especially memorable and moving encounter at a local Ebola Treatment Unit in Sierra Leone with a nurse named Rebecca Johnson, who contracted the disease, survived and then immediately became a caregiver again. I also met other patients at the same Unit who had been cured from Ebola and proudly showing off their certificates that they were cured completely from Ebola.

Nurse Johnson's commitment should move us all to do more to end the outbreak -- and to stop the stigma that she and so many victims and caregivers face.

During my visit, I saw the progress that is being made. The rate of transmission is slowing in many places. Where the strategy of isolation of the patients and treatment, contact tracing and safe and dignified burial is implemented, it is working. Some areas that were once hot spots, such as Lofa County in Liberia, have been free of Ebola for weeks.

I was inspired by the sense of ownership shared by the leaders of the government and the people. Everywhere I went -- at the airport, the presidential offices, the treatment centres -- anywhere and everywhere - I had my temperature checked, and washed my hands in chlorine solution and followed all other precautions. That means everybody is now going by health protocols.

At the same time, I emphasized that despite inroads, Ebola remains an emergency and there can be no let-up in our efforts.

Four steps are especially urgent:

First, we are adapting our approach to fit the emerging picture of the crisis. Instead of one outbreak spreading relentlessly from the epicentre, we are now seeing dozens of isolated chains of transmission. The outbreak is evolving, and so has our response.

Second, we are increasing emphasis on hunting the virus. This operation involves teams of doctors and nurses, lab technicians and epidemiologists able to deploy to the remotest areas to increase treatment and tracing. National Governments, communities and the health [sector] will play a central role. Let us remember that the affected area is very big -- larger than the United Kingdom -- and home to millions of people, and we cannot afford to miss a single case.

Third, we must step up recovery efforts now. That means restoring essential services, getting children back in school, getting people back to work, rebuilding shattered economies and caring for thousands of orphans.

Fourth, we must learn the lessons of Ebola, which go well beyond strengthening public health systems. The international community needs better early warning and rapid response. I intend to engage Member States in a serious effort to explore what more we can do to stay ahead of the next outbreak of disease -- a test that is sure to come.

Today, our immediate goal is simple: zero cases. Even one case can trigger an epidemic.

Over the past few days, I witnessed immense suffering. Ebola is a terrible disease that denies the humanity of its victims and stigmatizes its survivors. But I also saw almost superhuman acts of kindness and support.

My presence in the office today is meant to send an important message: where people show no symptoms, others should show no fear.

Ebola caregivers should be praised, not shunned. People who have travelled to Ebola-affected countries and have no signs of infection, are no threat.

I also repeat my call to avoid travel restrictions, border closures and other counter-productive obstacles. As we fight the Ebola virus, it is equally crucial to combat the contagion of fear.

I thank the many countries that have stepped forward with generous contributions of people, equipment and funds. If we are to win this battle, we need even more life-saving solidarity. I encourage the world to continue stepping up. I thank you.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Secretary-General. You said that lessons need to be learned and that you're going to be asking the Member States. Do you have any suggestions of what they should do? And also on another issue that could confront Member States, do you think that the United Nations should be doing something to help try and combat this outbreak of cyber-vandalism and cyber-terrorism that has erupted around the world here while you were in Africa?

SG: First of all, we still need [many] more resources and help for those countries and people affected by Ebola – human resources, medical doctors and nurses and health workers, and financial support and equipment and logistical support. I have seen such generous support coming not only from governments, but also from many NGOs, and this support is coming not only from the developed world, but many developing countries. This is quite moving and this is a true face of humanity and I fully appreciate this.

Since our strategy is working, and this curve has been bent, it's going down, but not fast enough. We have to make this curve [move] downward fast so that we will see zero cases. I have been urging the United Nations system, as well as countries concerned, that we should make this a short-term goal, not even mid-term goal, so that we can finish [this] off as soon as possible. For that, we really need continuing support. I am very much grateful for such support. I know that Member States are, in a sense, very much spread [thin] on this giving of aid – we have so many crises starting from Syria and many humanitarian crises in Africa. But this is a very short-term goal. We can do it now.

On your second part, this rise in the incidence and severity of cyber-attacks is very concerning to the United Nations and to all of us. I sincerely hope that the United Nations and the whole international community should work very closely to prevent this kind of senseless cyber-attack.

Q: I am sure that those people that you met, those authorities that you met, have told you about some challenges they are facing on the ground. Could you give us some details about the challenges they are facing?

SG: Strategy on the international part and the civil society part – I think we've been trying to mobilize all what we need to do, as I have just said, but we need more. Then I have been urging the leaders of the concerned countries that now, as we have been going through the first phase of immediately addressing this one, now, as we are seeing some downward trend, now it's time for countries to think about the recovery strategy. UNMEER [United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response] is not mandated [to address] this recovery, but I have asked this morning that all UN development agencies, led by UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] to help those countries to plan the recovery. They have been profoundly affected in socio-economic areas, and there are a lot of trade restrictions and travel restrictions, import and export [restrictions]. Therefore, we need to think about that. On the part of countries affected, there are a lot of things for them to do in coordination, in parallel, with what the international community is doing. I have been asking leaders [to] please take ownership in social mobilization.

And there is some huge issue of culture and tradition, and this culture and tradition are very good traditions, thousand-year long traditions, but this Ebola virus is [of] a very unique and extraordinary nature [and] we have to cut it off as soon as possible. Therefore, just a safe and dignified burial, that really helps greatly. As you know, the United Nations has been campaigning for what we call the "70 per cent/70 per cent" strategy. That has largely worked. Whenever there are some patients or suspected persons who are showing symptoms, they should be immediately isolated, separated, from [their] families and get professional medical support. And when somebody dies, unfortunately, then they should be in a dignified way and safe way buried, but because of the lack of such practices, we have seen unexpectedly many more new cases. But now, largely, we are holding, in some cases, 80 per cent of this policy guideline has been kept. Now our target is 100 per cent to 100 per cent.

Q: Secretary-General, the Security Council will later be holding its first ever meeting on the situation of human rights in North Korea. It's an issue you're well acquainted on. Can you tell us in your view how the human rights situation in North Korea should be an issue of international concern?

SG: I'm aware of this and I've been closely following this situation on the DPRK [Democratic People's Republic of Korea]'s human rights issues.

Speaking broadly in general terms, human rights is one of the three pillars of the United Nations Charter and that should be the basis of all our work. When there is no human rights promotion and protection, there cannot be, it's very difficult to think about political stability as well as sustainable development. That is why human rights should be given the highest priority for any countries in dealing with United Nations principles. When there is a serious, gross violation of human rights, then it can create a lot of movement of people fleeing the countries, and it creates refugee issues and [displacement] problems. Then, it affects the political stability and it affects development. Therefore, the United Nations regards this with the highest priority on protecting human rights. I am closely following what kind of decision the Security Council will take on this matter.

I wish you happy holidays and continued good health and success and happiness to you and to your families. Thank you very much. Thank you.