

Ebola: ending the current outbreak, strengthening global preparedness and ensuring WHO's capacity to prepare for and respond to future large-scale outbreaks and emergencies with health consequences

The Executive Board,

Having considered the reports on WHO's response to the Ebola virus disease outbreak;¹

Deeply concerned by the 21 831 cases and 8690 deaths reported to date and the continuing infections and deaths in affected countries, as well as the potential risk of spread to neighbouring countries and beyond;

Emphasizing the need for Member States² and other relevant actors to extend urgently all possible means of support to the affected and highly at-risk countries to end the Ebola outbreak, and stressing the importance of evidence-based responses and community engagement to prevent fear, stigma and discrimination;

Reaffirming that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being, and reiterating its determination to take further action on social determinants of health;

Recognizing that the current outbreak demonstrates once again the urgency for all countries of having strong, resilient and integrated health systems capable of fully implementing the International Health Regulations (2005), and of having the capacity for health-related emergency preparedness and progress towards universal health coverage that promotes universal, equitable access to health services and ensures affordable, good-quality service delivery;

Recalling resolution WHA64.10 on strengthening national health emergency and disaster management capacities and the resilience of health systems, which reaffirms, inter alia, that countries should ensure the protection of health, safety and welfare of their people and should ensure the resilience and self-reliance of the health system, which is critical for minimizing health hazards and vulnerabilities;

¹ Documents EBSS/3/2, EBSS/3/3, EBSS/3/INF./1–5.

² And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

Committed to an effective and coordinated response both for the current Ebola crisis and to make the corrective changes needed to prevent, detect and contain future outbreaks, and reaffirming the central and specialized role played by WHO in emergency preparedness and response, including in health emergency situations as described in Health Assembly resolutions WHA54.14, WHA58.1, WHA59.22, WHA64.10, WHA65.20 and WHA65.23;

Recalling resolution WHA65.20, which affirms WHO's role as the health cluster lead in responding to the growing demands of health in humanitarian emergencies, and recognizes the specific requirements for effective health-related emergency operations;

Recalling that the WHO's Emergency Response Framework has so far been the basis for WHO's role, responsibilities and work in all emergencies with public health consequences;

Reaffirming WHO's responsibilities under the International Health Regulations (2005);

Noting that an effective response during an outbreak requires all levels of the Organization to continually adapt and adjust resource allocation, methods of work and information practices, with a clear focus on results;

Emphasizing in this respect that the response at all levels of WHO must be guided by an all-hazards health emergency approach, emphasizing adaptability, flexibility and accountability; principles of neutrality, humanity, impartiality, and independence; and predictability, timeliness, and country ownership; and building on effective collaboration within the Organization's mandate with other relevant actors;

Reaffirming the global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property;

Acknowledging that there is a linkage between addressing Ebola, including the control and elimination of neglected tropical diseases, and the global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property and a pooled fund of global health research and development;¹

Commending all Member States,² organizations, including nongovernmental organizations, other entities and individuals that have provided assistance in cash and in kind, including the large number of medical professionals in response to the Ebola outbreak;

Recognizing the urgent need for an improved and more effective and coordinated response capacity for the international community, and especially for WHO and Member States,² in responding to health-related emergencies;

Committing to further mobilize resources to strengthen national, regional and global preparedness and preventive tasks against the threat posed by infectious diseases to global health and strong, sustainable and balanced growth for all;

¹ See resolution WHA66.22.

² And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

Emphasizing also the fundamentally civilian character of humanitarian assistance, and reaffirming, in situations in which military capacity and assets are used as a last resort to support the implementation of humanitarian assistance, the need for the use to be undertaken with the consent of affected States and in conformity with relevant provisions of international law,¹

Current context and challenges; stopping the epidemic; and global preparedness

1. EXPRESSES its unwavering commitment to contain the Ebola outbreak and to remain engaged in promoting urgent actions to accelerate prevention, detection, control and treatment until we reach zero cases of Ebola virus disease; to contribute to building resilient health systems in the affected countries and other highly at-risk countries; and to provide support for people who have survived Ebola, and their families, and for children orphaned by the disease, including psychosocial support;

Leadership and coordination

2. RECALLS and REAFFIRMS the constitutional mandate given to WHO to act, inter alia, as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work, and to furnish, in emergencies,² necessary aid upon the request or acceptance of governments, and recognizes the need to accelerate ongoing reform of the Organization;

3. FURTHER REAFFIRMS WHO's role as the lead agency of the global health cluster, including its role to ensure the timely declaration of appropriate response levels to humanitarian emergencies with health consequences, and calls on Member States³ and relevant actors in humanitarian situations with health consequences to support WHO in fulfilling its role as lead agency of the Global Health Cluster within its mandate;

4. FURTHER REAFFIRMS that, in connection with the declaration on 8 August 2014, by the WHO Director-General that the 2014 outbreak of Ebola virus disease in some West African countries is a public health emergency of international concern, all WHO authorities with respect to the administration, deployment and other human resource matters concerning preparedness, surveillance and response rest with the Director-General, and shall be exercised in a manner consistent with the principles and objectives of WHO's Emergency Response Framework, while minimizing the negative impact on regular and routine work of WHO;

5. INVITES the Director-General to consider assigning, immediately following the Special Session, for the duration of the outbreak of Ebola virus disease, a Special Representative with the appropriate grade and authority to be responsible for all aspects of coordination at all three levels of the Organization and response for the current outbreak;

6. REAFFIRMS the authority of the Director-General to reallocate existing resources, as appropriate and needed, subject to existing authorities, procedures and agreements, without compromising the Organization's programme priorities, as needed to enable an efficient and accelerated response to end the current epidemic of Ebola virus disease;

¹ See United Nations General Assembly resolutions 60/124 and 69/135.

² See also resolutions WHA34.26, WHA46.6, WHA48.2, WHA58.1, WHA59.22, WHA64.10 and WHA65.20.

³ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

7. AFFIRMS the essential role of the WHO country representatives in any outbreak and response situation and expects all levels of the Organization to cooperate with and support the Director-General in her duty to take all necessary measures so that each country office, in particular for affected and highly at-risk countries and areas, has the right skill set and expertise to match the public health challenges they face;

8 FURTHER AFFIRMS the critical role of the WHO regional offices in any outbreak and response situation, under the authority of the Director-General, and requests the Director-General and Regional Directors to take all measures for the highest level of coordination and collaboration among all levels of the Organization to jointly meet the public health challenges they face, including measures to strengthen the routine and immediate sharing of information on outbreaks of infectious diseases or emergencies with health consequences;

9. REQUESTS the Director-General to further improve communication, coordination, and information sharing between WHO and the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, to enable Member States¹ and other partners to engage more effectively in the response, and requests a report outlining the specific role of WHO within the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response by March 2015;

10. CALLS ON the Director-General to improve the transparency and reliability of health-related needs-assessment processes;²

Health systems

11. CALLS ON Member States¹ to further strengthen coordination on personnel, logistics, supplies, equipment and related infrastructure, with a view to accelerating the effective response to Ebola virus disease and converting it to longer-term health system strengthening, particularly in the most affected countries, building on the results of the WHO meeting held in Geneva on 10 and 11 December 2014 on “Building resilient health systems in Ebola-affected countries” and the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005), and in this context requests the Director-General to give technical advice to the most affected countries for developing their country plans, to be discussed in an upcoming conference;

12. ENCOURAGES Member States¹ to consider promoting health system strengthening and core capacities required under the International Health Regulations (2005) for inclusion in the implementation of the health goal of the post-2015 development agenda;

13. CALLS ON Member States¹ to strengthen capacities to recruit, develop, train, and retain the health workforce in developing countries, particularly in the most affected and highly at-risk countries;

14. FURTHER CALLS ON Member States¹ to strengthen support for health care workers to enable local and regional surge capacity, as the most important basis for emergency and outbreak response, which includes ensuring the availability of adequate isolation, care and treatment facilities and essential supplies, and strengthening national and regional capacities for surveillance, including providing support for developing countries to build capacity;

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

² See United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/124.

15. URGES Member States¹ to establish, promote and foster regional and subregional collaboration, as well as interregional cooperation within WHO, including sharing of experience and expertise for capacity development to strengthen the role of the local health systems and workforce in the response to emergencies and other crises;²

16. REAFFIRMS that integrated health care, based on access to health and universal health coverage, is the best approach for strengthening health systems, and calls on Member States¹ to accelerate implementation efforts;³

17. TAKES NOTE of the current challenges facing the operational response to the outbreak of Ebola virus disease, as described in document EB136/26, endorses the steps outlined to meet these challenges, as described in document EBSS3/INF./5, and requests the Director-General to ensure that the required human and other resources are deployed to this end as a matter of priority and urgency;

Medical assistance

18. RECOGNIZES the importance of providing for, as much as possible, the safety and protection of health care workers, taking into account the resolution on global health and foreign policy adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 5, 2014;⁴

19. CALLS ON health service providers to ensure that health workers are provided with adequate training and protective gear necessary to minimize their risk of infection from disease;

20. CALLS ON Member States¹ affected by outbreaks and health emergencies to provide adequate security to protect all health workers from violence;

21. REAFFIRMS the value of foreign medical teams to the outbreak response, and requests the Director-General to ensure WHO is able, building on the newly established Foreign Medical Teams unit at WHO, to coordinate offers of and requests for the deployment of equipped and experienced foreign medical teams to fill urgent needs and to systematize the formation, training, and support for these foreign medical teams in a timely manner;

22. FURTHER REAFFIRMS the value of ensuring the effective deployment of all possible health services, reserve medical teams and the vital consumables to control diseases, by a process of consultation, coordination and integration based on the request or acceptance of the host countries, recognizing that foreign medical teams are intended to support temporarily the national health system, with a view to its sustainable strengthening;

23. REQUESTS the Director-General, in consultation with Member States,¹ to further develop mechanisms for the use of existing emergency stand-by capacities, including, where appropriate, regional humanitarian capacities, through formal agreements, and to report on the issue to the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly;⁵

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

² See resolution WHA64.10.

³ See resolutions WHA67.24 and WHA63.16.

⁴ Resolution 69/132.

⁵ See United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/124, paragraph 13.

Information

24. CALLS ON Member States,¹ consistent with the International Health Regulations (2005), to strengthen disease surveillance capacity and data and information flows between local and national levels and with WHO at country, regional and global levels in order to enable a full and effective response to the current epidemic of Ebola virus disease, and to ensure early reporting and detection for any future outbreak;

25. REQUESTS the Director-General to take all necessary steps to strengthen surveillance, effective and timely dissemination of data and information, and health information capability, required to control the epidemic, and to apply lessons learnt to future WHO work in this regard;

26. FURTHER REQUESTS the Director-General to develop, integrate, and support common tools and coordination mechanisms, such as web portals, as appropriate, to track activities across all aspects of WHO's work to end the current outbreak of Ebola virus disease, and identify gaps and formulate concrete needs in order to prevent and respond more effectively to future outbreaks;

27. FURTHER REQUESTS the Director-General to ensure, in the context of the present emergency, that relevant information, especially concerning details of assistance pledged and delivered to the response effort is shared actively, and in a timely and transparent manner, with Member States¹ and other partners, with a view to facilitating effective resource use and response, and requests relevant Member States¹ to assist the Director-General by providing all such information to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs through their financial tracking service in a timely and transparent manner;

Preparedness

28. RECOGNIZES the urgency, in the context of the current outbreak, of addressing the immediate needs in preparedness and response capacity, in particular in highly at-risk states, as identified by WHO, and calls on all Member States¹ and the international community to enhance this effort, giving appropriate priority to the disease surveillance, preparedness, and emergency work of WHO;

29. FURTHER RECOGNIZES the importance of addressing longer-term systemic gaps in capacity to prevent, detect, protect against, control, and provide a public health response to, the international spread of disease and calls on Member States¹ to fulfil their commitment to full implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) and, in particular, to accelerate action by and support for West and Central African States and other at-risk States, and furthermore commends in this regard North–South, South–South, triangular and bilateral cooperation and exchange of best practices;

30. URGES Member States,¹ supported by WHO, to work across sectors and stakeholders, including education, transport and regulatory systems, to ensure that preparedness and long-term sustainable capacity to prevent, detect, protect against, control, and provide a public health response to, the international spread of disease is embedded in communities and can facilitate community mobilization in case of an emergency with health consequences;

31. RECOGNIZES that global preparedness needs continuous commitment to research and development, reliance on a multisectoral approach, strengthening of health systems, economic development in developing countries and improved health status;

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

32. FURTHER RECOGNIZES the importance of timely sharing of information on diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic products registered at the national or regional level, among Member States,¹ under the auspices of WHO, and the routine evaluation of the effectiveness of such products for the purpose of their timely use in response to an epidemic and requests the Director-General to provide, to the Executive Board at its 138th session, options for strengthening such information sharing, and for enhancing WHO's capacity to facilitate access to these products, including the establishment of a global database, starting with haemorrhagic fevers;

Therapeutic drugs and vaccines

33. RECOGNIZES the good progress made to date, under the leadership of the WHO in the process of developing Ebola vaccines and requests the Director-General to ensure the sustainability of the working groups on therapeutic drugs and vaccine clinical trial designs while they are needed, to ensure continued progress in the development of quality, safe, effective and affordable vaccines and treatments, while emphasizing the importance of completing WHO's work on emergency regulatory mechanisms and procedures ensuring patient safety, committing results of this work to the most affected countries in West Africa as a first priority, with an accompanying distribution and financing plan, to be communicated to Member States¹ as soon as it is ready;

34. REQUESTS the Director-General to evaluate the current status of the epidemic and to disseminate information as to the most critical research studies to complete; and requests the Director-General in consultation with technical experts and Member States¹ regulatory agencies to develop guidance on the value and limitations of the data obtained from the clinical trials, giving particular attention to ethics, quality, efficacy and safety;

Ensuring WHO's capacity to prepare for and respond to future large-scale and sustained outbreaks and emergencies

35. AFFIRMS that a primary goal in reforming WHO's capacity to respond to future large-scale and sustained outbreaks and emergencies is to enable the Organization to support and/or build Member States¹ capacity to prevent, detect, prepare for and respond to such outbreaks and emergencies;

WHO's structure and human resources

36. REAFFIRMS that all relevant WHO authorities with respect to administration, deployment and other human resource matters concerning preparedness, surveillance and response rest with the Director-General for outbreaks and emergencies with health consequences, and shall be exercised in a manner consistent with the principles and objectives of WHO and its Emergency Response Framework;

37. REQUESTS the Director-General to strengthen the emergency operational capabilities of the Organization to enable it to fulfil its constitutional mandate and respond to emergencies with health consequences on the basis of an all-hazards approach;

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

38. UNDERLINES that it is essential in respect of the health emergency response that the Organization be capable of delivering on the complex and varying scale of health emergency response, emphasizing in particular systems for human resources, resource mobilization and financing, planning and information management, and ensuring unambiguous leadership and a coherent approach towards outbreak and health emergency operations for all levels of the Organization;

39. RECOGNIZES that, among others, the shortcomings in WHO's human resources systems and processes slowed down the response to Ebola virus disease, and requests the Director-General based on lessons learnt and taking into account the current reform efforts, to accelerate WHO's efforts on human resources reform, particularly by implementing at all three levels of the Organization robust recruitment and performance management, including performance review and mobility policies by the end of 2015 in order to rapidly match staff skills to urgent needs and to report to the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly on plans for implementation and further expansion, taking into account the interim assessment requested in paragraph 52;

40. REQUESTS the Director-General to review the system for nomination, selection, training, and the performance review and improvement plan of WHO country representatives, taking into account, and without prejudice to, current reform efforts, with a view to improving expertise in each of the three core areas of WHO's mandate – normative work, technical support to countries, and emergency and outbreak response – and supports the Director-General in exercising her authority to add or change staff with appropriate expertise at the country and regional level, and to report on implementation to the Executive Board at its 138th session;

41. STRESSES the importance of WHO personnel understanding and respecting national and local customs and traditions in their countries of assignment and communicating clearly their purpose and objectives to local populations in order to enhance their acceptance, thereby contributing to their safety and security;

42. RECALLS recommendation 12 of the 2011 IHR Review Committee contained in document A64/10, which called for the establishment of a more extensive global, public health reserve workforce, and requests the Director-General to take immediately the necessary steps to draw up her plan in consultation with Member States through regular informal consultations, and with the Steering Committee of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, with the following three elements, each of which are composed of comprehensive emergency response teams that can be promptly and efficiently deployed, for service in countries that request or accept such assistance, for adequate periods of time, and with adequate resources, and to report to the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly for its consideration and decision:

(a) adequate numbers of dedicated and trained WHO staff with appropriate range of skills positioned at all levels of the Organization, particularly at country level, to properly implement ongoing emergency relief programmes, including surveillance, and to provide adequate internal surge capacity to respond to acute emergencies with health consequences, with efforts made to enhance representation from developing country practitioners, including at WHO headquarters;

(b) deepened and expanded partnerships building on existing platforms, notably the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, the Global Health Cluster, existing and new stand-by partners, and foreign medical teams, with the additional aim of building capacity in countries;

- (c) strengthened mechanisms for working with other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, and relevant actors, as appropriate, to assist in assuring a response commensurate to the scale of any emergency;

Research and development

43. RECOGNIZES the urgent need to encourage and maximize efforts on scientific, epidemiological and biological research, including the sharing of samples and epidemiological data in accordance with national or regional legislation on Ebola, and on health technologies and promote cooperation in this field between countries, as a contribution to international efforts directed towards tackling the epidemic and for the aim of consolidating the scientific, medical and health capacities of the most affected countries, and the need for the global community to continue work on research and development, including for emerging and neglected tropical diseases;

44. FURTHER RECOGNIZES WHO's leadership role in supporting a prioritized research agenda for Ebola and calls on Member States¹ and relevant actors to ensure that resources and efforts take into account and support, as appropriate, the prioritized research agenda;

45. FURTHER RECOGNIZES the need to incorporate lessons learnt from the outbreak of Ebola virus disease into the evaluation of the global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property; considers, as appropriate, the linkage to pooled funds for global health research and development to facilitate the development of quality, safe, effective, affordable health technologies related to the needs of affected countries; and calls on Member States¹ to secure sustainable financing for health research and development on emerging and neglected tropical diseases, including Ebola, and enhance access to health products and medical devices to address the health needs of developing countries;²

46. CALLS ON Member States¹ to continue to collaborate as appropriate, on models and approaches that support the delinkage of the cost of new research and development from the prices of medicines, vaccines, and other diagnostics for Ebola and other emerging and neglected tropical diseases, so as to ensure their sustained accessibility, affordability, availability, and access to treatment for all those in need;

Resources

47. REQUESTS the Director-General to take all necessary steps to ensure that, in the case of outbreaks and emergencies with health consequences, funding can be speedily reallocated and disbursed to areas of most need, without compromising the Organization's programme priorities;

48. RECOGNIZES the need for adequate resources for the preparedness, surveillance and response work of WHO, agrees in principle to establish a contingency fund, taking into account recommendation 13 of the 2011 IHR Review Committee contained in document A64/10, subject to a decision to be taken by the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly, and requests the Director-General to provide options on the size, scope, sustainability, operations and sources of financing for such a fund, and accountability mechanisms, including on possible internal sources of funding from within WHO's existing Programme budget, taking into account other relevant financing mechanisms and emergency

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

² See resolutions WHA61.21, WHA62.16 and WHA66.22.

funds already in operation or being considered, at regional and global level, taking into account the interim assessment requested in paragraph 52 and to report on such options, through the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee, to the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly for its consideration and adoption;

49. FURTHER RECOGNIZES the valuable contribution to global capacity to prevent, detect and respond to future outbreaks being made through various initiatives at global and regional levels and other relevant actors, and calls on these efforts to be aligned with the International Health Regulations (2005) and the relevant work of WHO, to ensure coherence and effective action;

50. URGES Member States¹ to consider supporting and contributing to WHO work in this area as a matter of urgency;

Communication

51. REQUESTS the Director-General to continue to develop and implement an Organization-wide communications strategy to improve routine communications, messaging about preventive measures, risk communication, and emergency communications, ensuring that the new policy entails matching the content, form and style of communication with the media, timing and frequency that will reach the intended audience and serve its intended purpose;

Evaluation and next steps

52. REQUESTS the Director-General to commission an interim assessment, by a panel of outside independent experts, on all aspects of WHO's response, from the onset of the current outbreak of Ebola virus disease, including within the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, in implementing the WHO's Emergency Response Framework, and in coordination, including resource mobilization, and functioning at the three levels of the Organization, to be presented to the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly;

53. FURTHER REQUESTS the Director-General to prepare options for establishing an IHR Review Committee panel of experts pursuant to past practice to conduct an assessment of the overall prevention, preparedness and response to the outbreak of Ebola virus disease and the effectiveness of the International Health Regulations (2005) in facilitating that response, including what was implemented and what was not from the previous IHR Review Committee in 2011, and consideration given to steps that could be taken to improve the functioning, transparency, and efficiency of WHO's response under the International Health Regulations (2005) in future outbreaks, in all countries, aiming at strengthening health systems;

54. INVITES the Director-General to consider the establishment of an ad hoc advisory group under the auspices of the Executive Board, composed of operations experts from relevant stakeholders, including affected countries, to provide advice on administrative and logistical support to the Director-General as needed in the case of future outbreaks or emergencies with health consequences;

55. REQUESTS the Director-General to engage within the United Nations system on lessons learnt from this response for improving coordination and effectiveness for future outbreaks, and to update Member States¹ on a regular basis;

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

56. FURTHER REQUESTS the Director-General to consult with Member States,¹ other relevant actors, and the United Nations system on elements of the decisions included in this resolution to be prepared for the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly with a view to ensuring a consensus on how to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of WHO in outbreaks and emergencies with health consequences and taking into account, and without prejudice to, the overall WHO reform;

57. FURTHER REQUESTS the Director-General to report to the Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly on all grade 3 and United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee level 3 emergencies where WHO has taken action since the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly and calls for annual reports on WHO's actions in health emergency response.

Second meeting, 25 January 2015
EBSS3/SR/2

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¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.