

Conflict in new Ebola zone of DR Congo exacerbates complexity of response: WHO emergency response chief

“We know for example that there have been around 20 deaths,” Dr. Peter Salama, Deputy Director General of Emergency Preparedness and Response, told journalists in Geneva.

“We can’t at this stage confirm whether they are all confirmed or probable Ebola cases,” he added. “We expect however that the overall case count will rise in coming days to weeks, based on the trajectory of epidemics at this stage in their development.”

Speaking just over a week after the UN agency declared the last Ebola episode over, some 2,500 miles away to the west in DRC’s Equateur province, Dr. Salama said that WHO was unaware of the public health emergency in North Kivu province at that point.

The bad news is that this strain of Ebola carries with it the highest case-fatality-rate of any of the strains of Ebola, anywhere above 50 per cent and higher – *Dr. Peter Salama (WHO)*

The outbreak on the western side of the country in June, infected dozens, and led to 33 deaths, but despite several cases appearing in a major city on the Congo River, it was fully contained after a massive international and national response.

The top WHO official said that there was “no evidence” to suggest a link between the two outbreaks, although it appears “very likely” that they share the same deadly Zaire strain.

The death toll from the current Kivu episode is likely to rise, the WHO official said, adding that the alert was raised on 25 July after a woman and many members of her immediate family died after exhibiting symptoms consistent with Ebola.

“That event appears to have been a woman who was admitted to hospital around Beni, and on discharge had recovered from the original complaint”, he said. After leaving however, “she came down with a fever and other symptoms that were clinically consistent with Ebola, and later on, seven of her direct relatives also contracted the disease.”

Dr. Salama explained how longstanding conflict in Eastern DRC – involving more than 100 armed groups in the Kivu area and elsewhere – created an additional level of difficulty in trying to contain the deadly disease.

In the first week of February this year alone around Beni, [attacks displaced](#) more than 2,200, in addition to 1,500 displaced at the end of January. In the Djugu Territory to the south of North Kivu, inter-ethnic violence led nearly 30,000 to flee their homes to the provincial capital Bunia, at the beginning of the year.

“It’s going to be a very, very complex operation,” he said, noting that the vast country is home to the UN’s largest peacekeeping operation, the UN Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO).

One million of the province’s eight million inhabitants are displaced and getting access to some of those in danger of coming into contact with Ebola, will require an armed escort in some cases, the WHO official explained.

There is also the additional threat that those fleeing violence may also head into nearby Uganda, Tanzania and Burundi, taking the infection with them, Dr. Salama said, noting that additional surveillance measures are being implemented at crossing points.

“On the scale of difficulty, trying to extinguish a deadly outbreak pathogen in a war zone” is as the top of the scale, he added.

In the most recent Ebola outbreak a key part of the emergency response involved tracing anyone who had come into contact with suspected carriers of the disease. WHO staff could travel hundreds of miles on a motorbike to do this vital work, but this is likely to be much more difficult in view of the high level of insecurity in the Kivus.

One immediate priority is to confirm whether the latest outbreak involves the Zaire strain, since this can be treated with the same vaccine that was employed in Equateur province.

“It’s good news and it’s very bad news,” Dr. Salama said. “The bad news is that this strain of Ebola carries with it the highest case-fatality-rate of any of the strains of Ebola, anywhere above 50 per cent and higher, according to previous outbreaks. So, it’s the most-deadly variant of the Ebola virus strains that we have, that’s the bad news. The good news is that we do have – although it’s still an investigational product – a safe and effective vaccine, that we were able to deploy last time around.”

[UN to convene Yemen talks early next month in Geneva, envoy tells Security](#)

Council

The United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen announced on Thursday that after two years of stalled talks on resolving the crisis in the country, he plans to invite the warring parties to Geneva on 6 September for a round of peace consultations.

“It is time long past for us, together, to call for an early resumption of the political process, two years since the last round in Kuwait,” said Martin Griffiths, referring to the UN-supported peace talks that were first held three years ago in Switzerland before shifting to Kuwait in April 2016.

Since the uprisings that broke out in Yemen in early 2011, the UN has been engaged in helping Yemenis to find a peaceful solution. However, on 26 March 2015, a coalition of countries led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily at the request of President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi to secure the return of the Government to Sana’a, which had been seized by Houthi militias and allied units of the armed forces.

Three years on, the fighting is still raging, and the ensuing humanitarian crisis has only deepened in a country that was already one of the region’s poorest.

In the Council today, Mr. Griffiths said it is time to “begin the difficult and uncertain journey away from war” and that there is now a chance “to weigh the opportunities for peace” in the war-ravaged country.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy for Yemen, delivers his remarks during the Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East.

Describing the ongoing the battle for Hudaydah, a port city on the Red Sea, as “the centre of gravity of the war”, he stressed that the gap between the two sides is being narrowed “in a way that nobody expected”. This issue, he said, “has a better chance of being resolved within the context of a comprehensive political settlement”.

He called on Council members to “urge the parties to resolve this conflict through negotiation rather than through military means”, explaining that he will invite the warring parties to Geneva on 6 September for a round of talks.

“These consultations will provide the opportunity for the parties, among other things, to discuss the framework for negotiations, relevant confidence-building measures and specific plans for moving the process forward,” said Mr. Griffiths, requesting the Council’s support.

Having engaged with the parties, as well as with civil society, Mr. Griffiths said he is especially grateful for his meetings with Yemeni women. “I continue to consult them on elements of the peace process. Their voices are a constant reminder that Yemeni families bear the brunt of this conflict.”

“We know what can work. We have talked to all the sides. We have studied the experience of past efforts to resolve this conflict. One hundred days in Kuwait is a valuable guide for us,” he insisted.

The Director of Operations for the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), John Ging, also briefed the Council, painting a bleak picture of the situation on the ground.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

John Ging, Director of the Coordination and Response Division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, addresses the Security Council meeting on the situation in Yemen, 2 August 2018.

“You have heard the statistics many times: more than 22 million people – 75 per cent of the population – require humanitarian assistance and protection. Three years of conflict have left 2 million people displaced from their homes; 8.4 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from; and, the worst cholera outbreak in the world occurred in Yemen last year, with 1.1 million cases,” said Mr. Ging.

“The humanitarian situation is indeed shocking, both in scale and severity,” he stated.

“The toll of this conflict on civilians and civilian infrastructure is devastating. Incidents in which civilians are killed or injured continue to be reported with alarming regularity”, he said, calling all parties to “respect international humanitarian law, including the obligation to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, and to take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize incidental harm”.

Mr. Ging also paid tribute to the humanitarian organizations in Hudaydah who “stayed and delivered”, per their mandates. “About 90 per cent of people displaced by recent violence have, in fact, received emergency relief packages. These packages contain food, hygiene supplies and other supplies to reserve dignity,” OCHA’s Head of Operations explained.

“Humanitarian assistance – however effective and large-scale – cannot mitigate the destructive effect of conflict on every facet of daily life,” he stated. “The Yemeni people have suffered for too long and they have suffered too much. An end to this conflict is long overdue.”

[Human rights experts denounce Trump’s attacks against media](#)

The United Nations expert on free expression has condemned President Donald Trump’s repeated attacks on the press, warning that the US leader’s rhetoric is eroding public trust in the media and could spark violence against journalists.

“His attacks are [strategic](#), designed to undermine confidence in reporting and raise doubts about verifiable facts,” David Kaye, UN Special Rapporteur on [freedom of expression](#) and Edison Lanza, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, said in a joint statement on Thursday.

Mr. Trump has labelled the media as being the “enemy of the American people,” “very dishonest” and “fake news,” the statement said. Moreover, he has accused the press of distorting democracy and spreading conspiracy theories and blind hatred.

"These attacks run counter to the country's obligations to respect press freedom and international human rights law," the experts said, expressing concern that the attacks risk increasing targeted violence against journalists.

The experts stressed that over the course of his presidency, Mr. Trump and his administration have sought to undermine reporting that had uncovered fraud, abuse, potential illegal conduct and disinformation.

"Each time the President calls the media 'the enemy of the people' or fails to allow questions from reporters from disfavoured outlets," the experts continued, "he suggests nefarious motivations or animus." However, they pointed out that not even one time was he able to show any specific reporting that was driven by untoward motivations.

"It is critical that the US administration promote the role of a vibrant press and counter rampant disinformation," they underscored.

We stand with the independent media in the United States – *UN expert on freedom of expression*

To this end, they urged President Trump to not only "stop using his platform to denigrate the media" but to condemn the attacks, including press threats at his own rallies.

Affirming that media attacks go beyond Mr. Trump's language, they encouraged his administration, including the Justice Department, to "avoid pursuing legal cases against journalists in an effort to identify confidential sources," saying that it undermines the media's independence and blocks the public from accessing information.

The experts also appealed to the Government to "stop pursuing whistle-blowers through the tool of the Espionage Act."

"We stand with the independent media in the United States, a community of journalists and publishers and broadcasters long among the strongest examples of professional journalism worldwide," they asserted. "We especially urge the press to continue, where it does so, its efforts to hold all public officials accountable."

The experts encouraged all media to act in solidarity against the efforts of President Trump to favour some outlets over others.

"Two years is two years too much, and we strongly urge that President Trump and his administration and his supporters end these attacks," they concluded.

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

UN-backed meeting of African States targets terrorism, violent extremism

Regional security topped the agenda of a United Nations-backed joint summit on Central and West Africa searching, among other things, for a practical approach to fighting terrorism.

In a statement issued on Thursday through his Deputy Spokesperson, Farhan Haq, [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres commended the Central and West African regions for the successful Joint Summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) on Peace, Security, Stability and the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which took place on Monday in Lomé, Togo.

“The Secretary-General welcomes the [renewed commitment](#) of ECCAS and ECOWAS member States to strengthen cooperation on key peace and security challenges and is particularly encouraged by the decision to sign a Criminal Cooperation Agreement by the end of 2018 and to establish a ministerial committee to monitor implementation of the Summit decisions,” said Mr. Haq.

The UN chief also welcomed the decision of the Heads of State and Government from the two regions to hold consultations in the margins of the African Union summit in January, “and to meet every two years to review implementation of the decisions contained in the Lomé Declaration adopted at the Joint Summit.”

“The Secretary-General reiterates the commitment of the United Nations to continue to promote inter-regional cooperation and support the implementation of the decisions adopted by the ECCAS-ECOWAS Summit,” the statement concluded.

A region on the edge

In July, Mohamed Ibn Chambas, the Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel ([UNOWAS](#)), updated the Security Council on the “[volatile security](#) situation.”

Citing the spillover of the Malian crisis into Burkina Faso and Niger, and the widespread violence by non-state armed groups throughout the region, he noted that “the complexity of recent attacks...has had a devastating impact on local communities.”

In mid-June, François Louncény Fall, the Special Representative and head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa ([UNOCA](#)), told the Council that the scourge of terrorism and violent extremism continued to affect all Central Africa and [divert government resources](#) from development programmes to

security operations.

“Boko Haram and the Lord’s Resistance Army have not stopped their deadly attacks on civilians, committing egregious human rights abuses and causing countless victims,” he said, referring to the main armed groups active in the sub-region.

In the Summit’s final communique, the Heads of State and Government committed to cooperate in conflict prevention, promoting peace and stability in both regions through establishing and strengthening early warning and rapid response crises mechanisms.

They also committed to strengthen cooperation on insecurity, with the ECOWAS Commission president and ECCAS Secretary General to negotiate among the regional States on procedures for mutual legal assistance and judicial cooperation.

[Haiti: UN agricultural development fund supports hurricane-affected farmers with \\$11 million](#)

With many rural areas in Haiti still recovering from the devastation caused by Hurricane Matthew in 2016, the International Fund for Agricultural Development ([IFAD](#)) announced on Thursday that it is investing \$10.8 million help restore agricultural productivity in some the worst affected areas of the island nation.

The funds will be distributed through the Agricultural and Agroforestry Technological Innovation Programme, known by its French acronym PITAG, extending its reach to eight additional municipalities in Haiti’s South Department, and spreading sustainable agricultural practices and technologies.

“Haiti’s rural population suffers from a [vicious circle of low agricultural productivity](#), high environmental degradation and poor nutrition,” said Lars Anwandter, who leads IFAD’s programme in Haiti.

Weak agricultural practices in Haiti have been compounded by a series of natural disasters. The most recent, Hurricane Matthew, which struck the south-western part of the tiny island nation on 4 October 2016, left 2.1 million people severely affected, according to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) ([OCHA](#)).

As of February 2018, some 622,100 are reportedly still in need of food

security assistance.

While the situation in Haiti has improved since the hurricane hit, deep-seated vulnerabilities persist. Over the past few decades, Haiti has seen its soils, water reservoirs and woods severely degraded. [World Bank data](#) shows that 59 per cent of the total population lives below the poverty line and the figure rises to 75 per cent in rural areas.

Today, Haiti produces only 45 per cent of the food that Haitians need.

“[PITAG] aims to break this cycle and help small farm families improve their productivity, food security and income levels,” said Mr. Anwandter. For example, the programme proposes the combinations of fruit trees and vegetable cultivations as a means to achieve larger harvests and feed more people, all in an environmentally-sustainable manner.

The new technologies and practices endorsed by PITAG will be put in place through farmer field schools, a method of learning which involves community-based and peer-to-peer teaching programmes. After the training, small farmers will get tools, seeds and other inputs to practice the innovations they will have learned.

Currently, PITAG – a \$76.8 million programme – is already under way in many areas of Haiti thanks to financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP).

With 65,000 small farming households targeted, the project focuses particularly on women, youth and other vulnerable groups.