

[Ebola Outbreak in Democratic Republic Congo is 'largely contained': WHO](#)

Almost two months after the start of the latest [Ebola](#) outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), United Nations health experts announced on Tuesday that the deadly disease has “largely been contained”.

A total of 55 cases of Ebola have been recorded during the current outbreak of the often-deadly viral infection and 28 people have died, according to the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#).

Ebola is endemic in DRC and has been identified there nine times, since 1976. Before the current outbreak in Equateur Province, the most recent episode of the disease was in 2017, in northern Likati province. Four people died and four survived, according to WHO.

Spokesperson Tarik Jasarevic said that the development was an “important step” but “it is not the end”.

Experience has shown us that it only takes one case to set off a fast-moving outbreak – *Tarik Jasarevic (WHO)*

“We are cautiously confident regarding the situation and know that a continued aggressive response is required,” he said, adding that “experience has shown us that it only takes one case to set off a fast-moving outbreak.”

Ahead of the WHO announcement, there were fears that the disease might continue its spread from rural north-western DRC, along the key Congo River transport route, to the capital Kinshasa, which is home to 10 million people; and also spread to neighbouring countries.

Those concerns were based on the grim toll and progress of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa between 2013 and 2016, which killed more than 11,000 people in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

To counter the threat from the current outbreak – and making use of a new vaccine – the UN agency and Doctors Without Frontiers (MSF) quickly coordinated over an inoculation programme that began in the DRC city of Mbandaka, where around one million people live.

This was followed by another round of preventive vaccination in and around the town of Bikoro to the south, where the initial Ebola victims were identified.

According to WHO, the last confirmed case of Ebola in DRC was on 6 June.

Since then, all probable and suspect cases have been declared negative.

A key tactic used to counter the spread of the haemorrhagic disease has been contact-tracing.

During this current episode, WHO and MSF have traced contacts of those who are suspected of having the disease, administering more than 3,200 vaccinations.

The last 161 people to have come into contact with suspected Ebola virus carriers will finish their mandatory follow-up period on 27 June, at which point they will be declared virus-free, WHO says.

Meanwhile, on the ground in DRC, health teams are following as many as 20 suspect cases a day, said Mr Jasarevic: "We need to keep the work going in DRC to make sure that all suspect cases are being looked for and make sure that there are no new cases."

[Torture is unacceptable and unjustified 'at all times' underscore top UN officials](#)

Torture in any form, is absolutely unacceptable and can never be justified, top United Nations officials said on Tuesday, urging great support for victims worldwide.

In his message to mark the [International Day in Support of Victims of Torture](#), Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the "absolute prohibition" of torture is "stipulated in unequivocal terms" as a foundational principle, including within the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).

"Much has been achieved in the fight against this and other cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment and treatment, yet more action is needed to eradicate torture fully," he said.

["Torture remains unacceptable and unjustified at all times"](#), including during states of emergency, political instability, or even in a war."

In the message, the Secretary-General also paid tribute to all who stand in solidarity with the victims of torture and their families, and underscored that the victims have the right to justice, rehabilitation and redress.

Commemorated annually on 26 June, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture marks the moment in 1987, when the UN [Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#), came into

effect.

The International Day also serves as a rallying cry for all stakeholders including UN Member States, civil society and individuals to unite in support of victims of torture and those who are still subjected to the ghastly practice. It also highlights the need for prompt and specialized rehabilitation programmes to help victims “make the transition from horror to healing.”

“It takes decades to restore this broken human being as a result of the effects of a [pernicious attack](#) on their body and their mind,” said High Commissioner Zeid in a separate message.

In his [message](#), the UN rights chief also reiterated the vital role played by the Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture, a unique victim-focused mechanism that channels funding for the assistance to victims of torture and their families that helps over 50,000 torture victims and their families every year.

The UN human rights chief, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, also underlined the need for stable and peaceful States everywhere, to support victims of torture.

“If you do not pay attention” to the victims, he said, “and if you leave them unattended, they are the ones will keep the wounds of a State open because their suffering hasn’t been addressed.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights added that the [Fund](#) plays a “critical role in restoring some sense of humanity to societies and societies” where torture is still used.

[Cocaine and opium production worldwide hit ‘absolute record highs’ – major threat to public health says UN study](#)

The scourge of opium-based drugs and cocaine are a bigger global threat to public health and law enforcement than ever before, according to the latest [World Drug Report](#), released on Tuesday by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)).

The findings “show that drug markets are expanding, with cocaine and opium production hitting [absolute record highs](#), presenting multiple challenges on multiple fronts,” said UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov.

The 2018 Report provides an overview of the supply and demand of drugs as

well as their impact on health.

The UN drug and crime fighting chief said the annual report was “a key pillar of our support, along with assistance to translate international obligations into action and capacity building on the ground to enable effective responses,” he added, in order to “protect the health and welfare of humankind.”

Beyond the production of the opium-based street drug heroin, pharmaceutically-produced opioids account for 76 per cent of non-medical, prescription drug deaths worldwide, with the powerful synthetic opioid Fentanyl an increasing problem in North America, and Tramadol a growing concern in parts of Africa and Asia.

Accessibility of both for medical use is vital for treating pain, but traffickers manufacture them illegally, causing considerable harm to health.

UNODC revealed that global seizures of pharmaceutical opioids in 2016 was 87 tons – with West, Central and North Africa accounting for the vast majority and Asian countries reporting just 7 per cent of the global total.

From 2016-2017, global opium production jumped by 65 per cent – the highest estimate recorded by UNODC since it started monitoring the drug’s production at the start of this century.

The demographics

Turning to vulnerable age groups, the Report finds that drug use is highest among young people with research suggesting that 12- to 17-year-olds are at critical risk.

While the majority of people who misuse drugs are men, women have specific drug use patterns. The prevalence of non-medical opioids and tranquillizers is common to both, but women often begin abusing drugs at a later stage than men.

“UNODC is committed to working with countries to seek balanced, integrated solutions to drug challenges and achieve progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals,” Mr. Fedotov underscored in the report.

UN chief weighs in on drug abuse

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) also highlighted the dangers of growing drug abuse on Tuesday, saying that drug challenges are “among the most [complex problems we face.](#)”

In his message to mark the [International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking](#), he emphasized that the impact of illegal drugs – including on families, communities and sustainable development – underscored the need for international cooperation and effective law enforcement, in accordance with international standards, to stop organized networks and drug traffickers.

Mr. Guterres stressed that drugs must be addressed with “a holistic focus

across many fronts” while expanding evidence-based approaches to prevention, treatment and support.

The UN chief cited the outcome document adopted by the 2016 General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem, which outlines concrete steps for taking balanced action, rooted in the principle of shared responsibility.

“It is also flexible enough to allow countries to pursue national drug policies according to their priorities and needs,” he continued.

“I urge countries to advance prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and reintegration services; ensure access to controlled medicines while preventing diversion and abuse; promote alternatives to illicit drug cultivation; and stop trafficking and organized crime,” said the Secretary-General, adding that all these steps “would make an immense contribution to our work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.”

Aid teams respond to escalating southwest Syria conflict: 750,000 civilians are at risk

Vital humanitarian relief continues to reach Dera’a in south-west Syria, where 750,000 people are at risk and at least 45,000 people have been displaced amid a government-led offensive to regain opposition-held areas, UN aid teams said on Tuesday.

Clashes between forces loyal to the Government of Syria and armed opposition units have forced most to flee from eastern Dera’a to areas near the Jordan border, according to the [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs \(OCHA\)](#).

The uptick in violence comes despite a ceasefire deal covering Dera’a that was agreed by Turkey, Iran and Russia last year, OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke told journalists in Geneva.

“Civilian infrastructure has also reportedly been attacked and damaged,” he said, “including an airstrike on Sunday 24 June that took a field hospital in the town of Al-Hrak out of function”.

To help those in need, “food, health, nutrition, education and other core relief items” have been transported via cross-border deliveries from Jordan, the OCHA spokesperson added.

We expect the number of displaced people could more than double as the violence escalates – *Bettina Luescher (WFP)*

Another contributor to the aid effort, the [World Food Programme \(WFP\)](#), confirmed in Geneva that the fighting had closed main supply routes inside Syria.

It too relies on cross-border access and reaches affected families via the Ar-Ramtha border crossing between Jordan and Syria, WFP spokesperson Bettina Luescher explained, in accordance with a UN Security Council resolution allowing the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

“The World Food Programme is really worried about the situation,” she said. “We expect the number of displaced people could more than double as the violence escalates.”

To date, WFP has delivered ready-to-eat food to more than 30,000 people sheltering in villages and makeshift camps.

These rations provide enough food for one week and include canned foods such as tuna, chicken and beans. To help prevent malnutrition in infants, WFP has provided specialized nutritional products, Luescher said.

Those fleeing attacks have sought shelter to the west of Dera’a, in Quneitra governorate, WFP said in a statement which also highlighted that “retaliatory shelling” had targeted the governorate of Swaida, to the east.

Tarik Jasarevic, spokesperson for the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) said that more than 135,000 treatment units, including 2,100 trauma kits were ready to be sent to Dera’a from the capital Damascus “once the green light is received from the Syrian authorities”.

In addition, five medical mobile teams will be deployed “in coming days” to Dera’a, Mr. Jasarevic told reporters.

In terms of cross-border deliveries, WHO has more than 50 metric tonnes of emergency health supplies that “will cross the border into Syria” soon, he added.

[UN spotlights wellbeing of seafarers on International Day](#)

Highlighting the challenges – both physical and mental – faced by seafarers on their voyages, the United Nations [International Maritime Organization \(IMO\)](#) has called for greater attention to ensuring their wellbeing.

In his annual message for the [Day of the Seafarer](#), IOM Secretary-General Kitack Lim noted that many factors can affect the quality of life at sea, including shore leaves, prompt and sufficient wages and even “simple things” like the Internet or provision of exercise on board ships.

“All of these come, and more, come together, under the banner of ‘seafarers’ wellbeing’,” he said.

“Day of the Seafarer 2018 provides a platform to advocate for higher standards of welfare and enable shipping companies and others within the industry to show how they provide a good working environment for seafarers and thereby make a positive contribution to their wellbeing,” added Mr. Lim.

The theme for 2018 continues the focus IMO announced last year on the physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing of those at sea.

According to the UN agency, by addressing the issue of seafarers’ wellbeing and particularly mental health, the campaign can inform specific strategies to tackle stress and other issues affecting seafarers’ mental conditions – and make the tools available more widely known.

The campaign will also showcase best practices, as well as spotlight areas of concern and examples of shortcomings.

A major part of the campaign is an online survey where seafarers themselves are being encouraged to share their own views and experiences. The results of the survey will be analysed and presented to the IMO Council.

Alongside the survey, the campaign also has a strong social media focus and includes a photo competition where seafarers are being called to show the world “what a good day at the sea looks like.”

The Day of the Seafarer, marked annually on 25 June, was established in a resolution adopted by the 2010 Diplomatic Conference in Manila, the capital of Philippines, to recognize the unique contribution made by seafarers from all over the world to international seaborne trade, the world economy and civil society as a whole.