

Adopted Resolution

Stop Ebola - Global Justice Needed

Almost a year ago, the first case of the current Ebola epidemic occurred in West Africa. To date, the international community has failed to find an appropriate response to the crisis that has already seen more than 5.000 people die while the disease continues to spread. Worst-case scenarios project that if there is no response, between 600.000 and 1.4 million people could be infected by the end of January 2015. It is already a humanitarian catastrophe and it could become much worse.

The crisis is not a natural catastrophe, such as an earthquake - it is a human-made and could have been prevented. Instead, it flourished in a global environment of structural deficits that are not geared to care for the very poor. In order to end the crisis, long-term structural changes need to be combined with essential short-term action.

There are currently significant shortages in terms of care for people in West Africa, ineffective regional health care systems are a global problem and should be treated as such. More effort by the international community to provide ad-hoc support for the affected countries is needed. Even though the international community seems helpless in the face of difficulties regarding the disease, concentrated global action needs to be taken in order to stop it.

It is not only money that is necessary: Beds; experts; medicine; medical care; the training of health staff; infection control; contact tracing; epidemiological surveillance, alert and referral systems; community education and mobilisation; and the payment of health workers' salaries. All of this can be provided: European Union Member States should deploy health workers to support communities and train people on the ground to work in the health facilities. The EU must speak with one coherent voice and not with 28. Therefore, coordination needs to take place on EU level. More broadly, the international response needs to be better coordinated at the UN level to ensure quick and affective responses.

The cost of the epidemic is estimated to be around 33 billion USD, and countries struck by the disease are already facing a breakdown of their economies. Against this backdrop, the European Union and its Member States plan to give 1.3 billion USD to combat the crisis. This is not enough. More financial support is needed and Europe and the EU have to live up to their global responsibility.

Use local knowledge: The international scientific and health communities suffer from a lack of perspective from the Global South. In our post-colonial structured world, it is often forgotten that communities in the affected areas often have local experience on how to deal with infectious diseases. Understanding the societal and cultural context of the affected areas is key to achieve effective response. The use of local knowledge is often better adapted to the local situation. Therefore, local authorities, community groups, as well as women's groups, need to be in the lead in designing the local response to the crisis.

Even though the crisis is unprecedented, there is no excuse for the current hysteria and racist stereotypes. Measures that put everybody from a certain country under suspicion or create the perception of potential exclusion will not help to contain the epidemic. Furthermore, healthcare staff from the affected region need to be given the same treatment as healthcare staff from the Global North.

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However, short term measures will not address any future outbreaks of an epidemic. In order to be able to prevent and tackle such outbreaks there needs to be a radical change in global health policies. Funds for research on epidemic and the double burden of diseases need to be provided, regardless of prospects of immediate profitability. The EU health research budget needs to be shifted in this direction, with the aim to eradicate the most deadly neglected diseases in a short time.

Of equal importance is the licensing and production of medicine. One of the structural problems of the global health system is the system around patents and restriction of access. Expensive medical drugs produced by the West with the main aim of generating profit exclusively from sales in the West, reduce possibilities for health care in the Global South. Restrictions on affordable generic medicine produced by countries in the Global South, such as pressure from the Global North and regulations from the TRIPS agreement, need to be lifted. Treatment should be made free in case of an declared epidemic.

Currently, most worldwide medical research covers diseases that are common in "rich" countries (cancer, diabetes, etc.). In the past, research on Ebola vaccination failed due to lack of funding, as the disease was not considered to be a "profitable" one to invest in. This illustrates that a more global perspective on problematic diseases has to be taken by states and the EU when granting research funding.

Furthermore, capacity to fight neglected diseases should be established closest to possible outbreak zones. Research needs to be embedded in the local situation, taking into consideration delivering systems, local health facilities and traditions. Therefore, more medical research centres in the Global South are necessary. Financial support from the Global North can enable such structures.

In the long run, the establishment of a functioning health system is crucial in order to build resilience to potential outbreaks of epidemics. The Global North has a responsibility to support the Global South countries in creating functioning and sustainable resourced health care systems. Countries to which health staff migrate should compensate adequately to the country of origin for the services they receive.

The crisis will not end when the current outbreak comes under control. Instead, entire societies and economies will continue to suffer from the impact. These societies will have lost many of their health staff and their economies will be in a critical situation, as levels of trust will be low. Post-crisis support needs to be given and the money that is used for it needs to be stepped up.

Therefore the European Greens call for:

- Concentrated global actions, including stepping up the immediate funding to 33 billion USD, the provision of material and human capacity to assure an end the Ebola crisis.
- More co-ordination on the European and global level in battling the global health emergencies.
- Focusing on local knowledge in combating diseases and put local communities, especially women, in the lead of local responses.
- Change patent laws to enable companies in affected countries to produce and deploy generic medicaments, and fund their mass production.