

## Joint NGO statement

### International Conference: Effective International Response to Defeat Ebola in Sierra Leone

2 October 2014

*Delivered by Sanjayan Srikanthan, International Rescue Committee, on behalf of 34 NGOs*

The world is facing an unprecedented crisis in West Africa. Infection rates are growing exponentially – the number of cases is doubling roughly every three weeks. In Sierra Leone the situation is critical: Ebola has spread throughout the country, infecting at least 2,300 people that we know of; the real number is probably much higher. Many health centres and hospitals have closed and those that are still open are full to capacity, with sick people being turned away.

The international community has a window of opportunity over the next four weeks to stop the crisis from spreading completely out of control. To do so, we must support national authorities, health workers, humanitarian agencies and community groups to break transmission rates and halt the exponential increase in cases.

As I speak, our agencies have hundreds of staff on the ground fighting the spread of the disease. We are involved in every aspect of response from treatment to provision of equipment to body disposal and prevention and awareness raising, as well as dealing with secondary impacts like food security. We also have dedicated teams working in neighbouring countries to prepare for the worst case scenario. Our staff say they are fighting for the very survival of their communities.

We welcome the strong commitment demonstrated by many Governments so far in responding to the crisis, and the leadership shown by the UK Government in supporting Sierra Leone and in convening today's conference. But a further and massive increase in financial, human and material capacity is urgently needed to halt the spread of Ebola and mitigate its impacts on the hard earned development progress of Sierra Leone and other countries in the region. This is a matter of the utmost urgency.

Let me discuss six key ways the international community must respond in the next four weeks.

**1. Donors must act fast in committing and disbursing funds.** Like chasing a ball down a hill, every day that we delay in disbursing resources to affected countries, the more impossible it becomes to contain the disease. Only a quarter of the total required funding for the region has been committed. We urge donors to increase and quickly disburse national pledges against the UN Appeal within a two-week timeframe. Donors should ensure that funding is flexible, allowing NGOs to respond appropriately to a rapidly changing situation.

**2. Donors and governments must ensure that health care workers are trained and equipped.** Health care workers are our most precious resource in this crisis, but hundreds have already been infected. Health centres in Sierra Leone lack crucial tools and supplies for diagnosing, isolating and treating patients with Ebola and for protecting health workers tending to those infected by Ebola. We call on donors and governments to ensure that

health workers have training in Infection Prevention & Control, and consistent supplies of basic equipment including chlorine, gloves, personal protective equipment (or PPE).

**3. Governments must rapidly identify and deploy military and civilian capacity.**

Financing and equipment alone will not stop this crisis. There is an urgent need for human resources: Aid agencies simply do not have the medical, WASH or logistical staff we need to scale up our response. As a measure of last resort, we are calling on governments to release military capacity to set up facilities and help manage them, in accordance with the Oslo Guidelines, and to expedite the deployment of volunteers from health services and agencies. Governments must also create an enabling environment for volunteers. More people are now volunteering, but to access this huge and priceless resource requires a guaranteed medevac system, and other logistical and financial support. We call on states to solve this obvious and critical problem here today, by agreeing to operationalise and fund a dedicated medevac system for all staff, regardless of their nationality or organizational affiliation.

**4. Donors, governments and INGOs must support community mobilization efforts.**

Treatment will never be enough unless we use effective community mobilization, including support for local media, to reduce transmission and dispel rumours and misunderstanding about Ebola. This can be done far more effectively through the many community groups and associations who are active in treatment and messaging on Ebola. Donors should support these community mobilization efforts and provide logistical support to appropriate community-based activities. Governments and INGOs must work closely with local groups, consulting them before disseminating health promotion messaging, and ensuring that communities have access to accurate information about Ebola.

**5. States must urgently support preparedness and contingency planning in neighbouring countries.**

The UN estimates that it will cost almost \$1 billion to respond to Ebola and its secondary impacts, but this projection only covers the cost of the response in the three countries with confirmed cases. It is critical to work with governments in the region to strengthen preparedness and contingency planning so they are ready to quickly respond to any potential outbreak.

**6. The international community must respond holistically to all impacts of the crisis.**

The hidden cost of this Ebola outbreak is huge. As national resources are diverted to responding to the outbreak, health systems have collapsed. Easily treatable and preventable illnesses such as malaria and diarrhoea are claiming hundreds of lives, while mothers are dying in childbirth due to treatable complications. Children are missing vital months of education as schools have been closed. Many who are orphaned when parents die of Ebola have no one willing to care for them due to the perceived fear of transmission. We are urging donors and governments to implement a holistic response to the crisis, addressing the gender impacts of Ebola, the impacts on the wider health system, food security, protection and education.

We can turn the tide on this outbreak today, in this room. As aid agencies and campaigning organisations, we are all scaling up our work, doing all we can to support the people affected by Ebola. But we need your help. The international community needs to move faster than it has ever moved before to prevent a catastrophe in West Africa with global implications. Every new case is a testament to how much more we still need to do, and we are running out of time.

**The following NGOs endorse this statement:**

ActionAid UK  
CAFOD  
CARE International  
Christian Aid  
Children in Crisis  
Concern Worldwide  
Deutsche Welthungerhilfe  
GOAL  
Handicap International  
Health Poverty Action (HPA)  
InterHealth Worldwide  
International Health Partners  
International Medical Corps UK  
The International Rescue Committee  
Internews Europe  
Islamic Relief Worldwide  
King's Health Partners  
Médecins du Monde/Doctors of the World  
Mercy Corps  
Mission Aviation Fellowship  
Muslim Aid  
Norwegian Refugee Council  
The ONE Campaign  
Oxfam  
Plan UK  
RedR UK  
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)  
Samaritan's Purse  
Save the Children  
Solidarités International  
Street Child  
Worldwide Hospice Palliative Care Alliance  
World Vision UK  
Womankind Worldwide