Fighting Ebola: European Commission sends representatives to Sierra Leone and Liberia to coordinate EU support

The European Commission is continuing its active participation in the efforts to contain the outbreak of Ebola which has already claimed 2811 lives in Guinea, Liberia, Siera Leone and Nigeria. Two high-level officials from the Commission have visited Sierra Leone (Freetown) and Liberia (Monrovia) last week to discuss the coordinated response to the epidemic and to confirm continued European Union support to the affected countries.

Marcus Cornaro, Deputy Director General of the Commission’s Directorate General for Development and Cooperation (EuropeAid) and Philippe Maughan, Head of Sector for Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean at the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response (ECHO) met with President Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. They also held meetings with the national authorities (including the Minister of Health and Finance) and international organisations operating on the ground in response to the emergency. They also had exchanges with representatives of the US Army and the African Union who had just arrived to set up their respective missions.

On his return, Marcus Cornaro said: "The situation in the two countries is extremely serious and the international community must increase its support to fight the epidemic. In my meetings I confirmed that the EU has put a comprehensive range of support measures in place. We are determined to help the countries and the many victims with immediate support through humanitarian aid, but will also give development assistance to the region to strengthen health systems, as well as budget support to Sierra Leone and Liberia to cushion the severe macroeconomic impact of the crisis.”

Philippe Maughan added: “As a medical doctor and emergency healthcare expert, I commend the healthcare professionals working around the clock to contain the spread of the disease, often at risk for their own lives. The capacity of first responders is stretched. The surge of the international response in recent weeks is welcome, but it urgently needs to be translated to concrete action on the ground”.

Background

The EU has increased its response on several occasions since the outbreak of the epidemic and has so far pledged almost €150 million to help the affected countries. €11.9 million has been targeted at the most urgent humanitarian needs through Medecins Sans Frontieres, the World Health Organisation and the Red Cross. The Commission’ assistance includes ensuring treatment for infected patients and measures to contain the epidemic, as well as strengthening health care systems and improving food security, water and
sanitation. The EU is supporting the recently established AU mission "Support to Ebola Outbreak in West-Africa" with €5 million. The Commission has dispatched humanitarian health experts to each of the three most affected countries and on the UN's assessment team in the region. In Brussels, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is also part of the coordination effort, facilitating the exchange of information and hosting numerous intra-EU coordination meetings since the crisis broke this spring.

Three EU mobile laboratories are deployed in the region to help with the diagnostics and confirmation of cases and train laboratory technicians. Furthermore, Liberia and Sierra Leone will receive financial assistance through budget support to help them deliver health care services and bolster macro-economic stability in response to wider economic challenges arising from the crisis. For more detailed information on the EU's response to help fight the Ebola outbreak, see MEMO/14/520.

On 15 September, the European Commission hosted a high-level meeting to promote stronger international coordination of the response to the crisis.

For more information:

Website of EuropeAid Development and Cooperation DG: http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/
The European Commission's humanitarian aid and civil protection: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm
