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European Commission gathers high level stakeholders to discuss prevention, preparedness and response to health crises

The European Commission hosted a conference on December 2 on 'Health Crisis Prevention, Preparedness and Response', to explain the first results of the Union's long-term strategy in this area, including the deployment of EU Mobile Laboratories to combat the ongoing Ebola outbreak in Western Africa.

"Public opinion in the EU and throughout the world is increasingly concerned about preparedness and response in the public health sector and the Ebola outbreak in Western Africa has really brought this issue into the spotlight. This current epidemic is something from which we all need to learn" said Klaus Rudischhauser, Deputy Director General of EuropeAid, as an introductory remark to the conference.

This event gathered high level experts of health crisis management from EU institutions, the World Health Organization and public health institutes such as Institut Pasteur (Paris) or *Istituto Superiore de Sanita* (Rome), among other stakeholders. It provided an opportunity for the European Commission to present and explain its overall long-term strategy to address potential and bursting health crises.

The conference was also the occasion to announce the deployment of a new generation mobile laboratory, more robust and self-sustained, to be mobilised by the European Commission in Western Africa in early 2015 in order to address the ongoing Ebola outbreak by reinforcing diagnosis capacity and by training more local specialists.

The panel was chaired by Ms. Ana Gomes, Member of the European Parliament, who pointed out the necessity to learn the lessons from the Ebola outbreak and to address health crises as a priority at EU level, including in financial terms.

Ms. Isabelle Nuttall, Director for Global Capacities Alert and Response at the World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted the role of facilitator of WHO. "We cannot work alone" she declared, stressing the crucial work accomplished in common with the European Commission.

She also insisted in the necessity to substantially invest in prevention: "Investing is the key today; investing in capacity building is much more cost-effective than investing in responding to a crisis. (...) The focus is currently on Ebola, but let's invest in every crisis that may come, that will come". She also spoke in favour of additional capacities at ports of entry, referring to an ongoing joint EU-WHO project.

Mr. Christian Bréchet, Director General of Institut Pasteur (Paris), also advocated for investing in health crises prevention: "It's about sensing the emergencies", he declared, further developing on the crucial role to be played by Institut Pasteur and its solid worldwide network

of Health Institutes. Institut Pasteur has also been for long a solid partner of the European Commission to address health crises.

Background information

Among its main achievements, this Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) instrument of EU's development cooperation permitted the mobilisation in Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria, from the onset of the Ebola crisis, of three EU financed mobile laboratories aiming at diagnosing the Ebola virus among patients of affected regions and at training local medical staff.

These mobile laboratories come fully equipped, with staff. They work twelve hours a day, seven hours a week. They can process up to 80 samples a day and results are available within four hours. Since their deployment in March 2014, EU mobile labs contributed to detect a significant share of positive Ebola cases.

Beyond the Ebola outbreak in Western Africa, the EU remains mobilised in order to develop further measures to prevent potential future outbreaks.

Find out more on the long-term component of the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP):

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/human-rights-and-governance/peace-and-security/funding/instrument-contributing-stability-and_en

Find out more on the EU CBRN risk mitigation Centres of Excellence (CoE) initiative:

<http://www.cbrn-coe.eu/>

Find out more on the EU Mobile Labs mobilised in Western Africa against the ongoing Ebola outbreak: <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/emlabproject-ebola/>

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