

Demand Bio-Hazard Response to Ebola

by Douglas DeGroot

Sept. 9—Speaking at a special briefing at the United Nations Sept. 2, Dr. Joanne Liu, International President of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF/Doctors without Borders) called for an immediate mobilization of resources, including military, for bio-hazard containment of the Ebola epidemic. “Six months into the worst Ebola epidemic in history, the world is losing the battle to contain it,” she said, “Leaders are failing to come to grips with this transnational threat.”

Dr. Liu said that the fight against Ebola could be won, with a biological threat response, and a full-scale effort to build the necessary state infrastructure:

“Many of the Member states represented here today have invested heavily in biological threat response. You have a political and humanitarian responsibility to immediately utilize these capabilities in Ebola-affected countries.

“To curb the epidemic, it is imperative that States immediately deploy civilian and military assets with expertise in bio-hazard containment. I call upon you to dispatch your disaster response teams, backed by the full weight of your logistical capabilities. This should be done in close collaboration with the affected countries.

“Without this deployment, we will never get the epidemic under control.

“The following must be prioritized:

- “Scaling up isolation centers;
- “Deploying mobile laboratories to improve diagnostic capabilities;
- “Establishing dedicated air bridges to move personnel and equipment to and within West Africa;
- “Building a regional network of field hospitals to treat suspected or infected medical personnel.”

Just the First Step

Dr. Liu described this bio-defense team effort as the first step.

“We must also address the collapse of state infra-

structure. The health system in Liberia has collapsed. Pregnant women experiencing complications have nowhere to turn. Malaria and diarrhea, easily preventable and treatable diseases, are killing people. Hospitals need to be reopened, and newly created.”

She asserted that UN member states should not focus on coercive measures to defend their own borders, as this would drive people underground, leading to concealment of cases, thereby pushing the sick away from the health system, preventing containment of the virus.

The Ebola crisis is transnational, with social, security, and economic implications for Africa and the world. Dr. Liu concluded:

“It is your historic responsibility to act.

“We cannot cut off the affected countries and hope this epidemic will simply burn out. To put out this fire, we must run into the burning building.”

The World Has Failed

Dr. Liu cited the effects of the failure of the leaders of the world to respond:

- “In West Africa, cases and deaths continue to surge.
- “Riots are breaking out.
- “Isolation centers are overwhelmed.
- “Health workers on the front lines are becoming infected and are dying in shocking numbers.
- “Others have fled in fear, leaving people without care for even the most common illnesses. Entire health systems have crumbled.”

“I stand here today, as the president of a medical humanitarian organization on the front lines of this outbreak since it emerged. My colleagues have cared for more than two thirds of the officially declared infected patients. Even as we have doubled our staff over the last month, I can tell you that they are completely overwhelmed.

“Médecins Sans Frontières has been ringing alarm bells for months, but the response has been too little, too late. The outbreak began six months ago, but was only declared a ‘Public Health Emergency of International Concern’ on Aug. 8.

“While funding announcements, roadmaps, and finding vaccines and treatments are welcome, they will not stop the epidemic today.

“We have been losing for the past six months. We must win over the next three.”