



## **STATEMENT BY IFSW AFRICA REGION ON THE OUTBREAK OF EBOLA DISEASE**

The Ebola virus disease (EVD) which seem to have originated in a remote village in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1976 was first notified in West Africa in March 2014. The disease has been detected in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria and Senegal. The countries which have suffered the most devastating effect of this dreadful disease are Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. The rate at which the disease has spread within the spate of only 8 months is very alarming and unprecedented. Reports indicate that the disease has infected over 9000 people and has claimed nearly 5000 lives. The rate of infection has peaked to 1000 a week in Liberia.

It is a fact that Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia the most severely affected countries have one thing in common- weak health system, lack of human and infrastructure resources and recent emergence from long periods of conflicts and instability. The correlation between the spread of the disease and social development is a curious one for us as Social workers. As social workers we believe that the strengthening of health systems and provision of the needed infrastructural resources will help to significantly reduce the spread of the disease. It is heart rending that this dreadful is now killing the poor and vulnerable.

On August 8, the World Health Organization (WHO) Director General declared this outbreak as a Public Health Emergency of International concern. Much as we welcome this declaration we are of the opinion that Ebola is an international public Health Crisis which requires desperate and concerted efforts by the International Community to stop its spread. Ebola is health a threat to the whole world and not just to West African or Africans in general.

Unfortunately the response to this emergency has not been very encouraging. We are told that only a small fraction of the target amount for the Emergency fund has been raised

It is high time that advanced countries like The United States, France, Great Britain responded to the Ebola threat as they will do for threats of terrorism anywhere in the world. Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone need the support of the world to stop the spread of this disease in the short term and find a cure for it in the long term. We call upon member countries of the AU to contribute their quota to help stem the tide of the disease.

There are very grim projections that if this disease is not stopped from spreading we stand the risk of losing the entire communities and societies. The developed world will not be spared in this regard.

On behalf of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), AFRICA Region I wish to appeal fervently to the United Nations and the International community to come to the aid of Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Senegal in order to effectively fight the spread of the

Ebola disease and to find a cure and vaccine for it.

We acknowledged with gratitude the assistance given by the international community so far but we think more is required in terms of human and material resources.

We are glad that many people especially health workers from all over the world are volunteering and travelling to the affected countries to assist. We are grateful to them. More volunteers are needed and we take this opportunity to appeal for more volunteers.

In view of the devastating effects of the Ebola disease on the Economies of the most affected countries We call for the cancellation of debts owed by them.

We are disturbed by reports of discrimination and stigmatisation against persons from the West Africa subregion. Much as we are not against stringent measures to screen persons for Ebola we condemn the inhumane treatment of West Africans suspected to have Ebola. A case in point is the treatment meted to a Ghanaian suspected to have the Ebola virus in an European country. As Social Workers who believe and promote the dignity and worth of people we were appalled by the "untidy" manner in which the Ghanaian was handled.

Ebola is a health threat not only to AFRICA but also to the whole world and as such requires a swift effort to stop its spread. We are all at risk.

Our sympathies go to the Presidents and people of Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Nigeria for the loss of lives.

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