

Ebola Spurs Global Cooperation to Prevent, Detect and Respond to Future Health Crises

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Well before Ron Klain was named as the U.S. Ebola czar, the USG was urging the international community to confront the fact that the world is not ready for a deadly pandemic of any sort, much less one as daunting as Ebola. Aware that **Ebola alone could kill over 1 million people if international efforts fail**, President Obama — joined by Secretary of State Kerry, Health and Human Services Secretary Burwell, Secretary of Defense Hagel, and his National Security Advisor Susan Rice — met on September 26 to **discuss global health security with Ministers and experts from 44 nations**, the World Bank, the UN World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

President Obama challenged participants that, “... it is unacceptable if, because of lack of preparedness and planning and global coordination, people are dying when they don’t have to.” In his call to action, President Obama referenced not only Ebola, but many other deadly biologic threats from superbugs to terrorists seeking to use biological weapons. He warned that, “in a world as interconnected as ours, outbreaks anywhere...have the potential to impact everybody, every nation.”^[i] Political, financial, legal and regulatory changes to accelerate and facilitate private investment and international cooperation are now under discussion.

The President and Cabinet members cited humanitarian, economic and security threats posed by global health disasters, which could easily dwarf the costs of terrorism.^[ii] “Never has it been clearer that the world’s health security depends on paying attention to our weakest links,” HHS Secretary Sylvia Burwell said.^[iii] Even the United States is unprepared. The Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has reported that DHS does not have adequate supplies of ready to use equipment and drugs or effective procedures in place to undertake critical operations during a pandemic.^[iv] Yet, the US is helping to lead the way forward globally.

“Together, our countries have made over 100 commitments both to strengthen our own security and to work with each other to strengthen the security of all countries’ public health systems,” the President said. These commitments address 11 “Lines of Action”^[v] which focus on making progress within five years to combat anti-microbial resistance, improve biosecurity, prevent animal-to-human disease transmission, ensure effective immunization systems, accelerate detection, diagnosis and information-sharing regarding public health threats and to develop work force competencies and emergency facilities, procedures and relevant policy and legal structures. Going forward, 10 countries

have agreed to serve on the GHSA Steering Group. Chaired by Finland in 2015, it includes Canada, Chile, Finland, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Republic of Korea, the United States and international organizations.

The private sector can and must play a key role in developing, producing and supplying medicines, medical devices and technologies, health information systems, protective gear, disinfectants, management systems, waste disposal technologies, etc. As these efforts ramp up over the next 5 years, substantial new resources and incentives (public, philanthropic and private) will flow into these activities — and efforts to strengthen health systems – worldwide. Laws, regulations and procedures will change to enable more effective action and investment and the private sector will want to engage vigorously in the process.

^[i] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/26/remarks-president-global-health-security-agenda-summit>

^[ii] <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=123276>; <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1888>

^[iii] <http://www.hhs.gov/secretary/about/speeches/sp20140926.html>

^[iv] DHS Has Not Effectively Managed Pandemic Personal Protective Equipment and Antiviral Medical Countermeasures Effectively. http://www.oig.dhs.gov/assets/Mgmt/2014/OIG_14-129_Aug14.pdf retrieved September 26, 2014

^[v] Global Health Security Agenda: Getting Ahead of the Curve on Epidemic Threats, available at whitehouse.gov.