

AFRICA

## Ebola Cure Delayed by Drug Industry's Drive for Profit, W.H.O. Leader Says

By RICK GLADSTONE NOV. 3, 2014

The leader of the World Health Organization criticized the drug industry on Monday, saying that the drive for profit was one reason no cure had yet been found for Ebola.

In a speech at a regional conference in Cotonou, Benin, Dr. Margaret Chan, the director general of the organization, also decried the glaring absence of effective public health systems in the worst-affected countries.

At least 13,567 people are known to have contracted the Ebola virus in the latest outbreak, and 4,951 have died, according to the latest data on the W.H.O. website, which was updated on Friday. All but a few of the cases have been in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Dr. Chan said her organization had long warned of the consequences of greed in drug development and of neglect in public health.

In the midst of the Ebola crisis, she said, these “two W.H.O. arguments that have fallen on deaf ears for decades are now out there with consequences that all the world can see, every day, on prime-time TV news.”

The Ebola virus was discovered in the Democratic Republic of Congo, then known as Zaire, in 1976. But because it was confined to impoverished African countries, Dr. Chan said, there was no incentive to develop a vaccine until this year, when Ebola became a broader threat.

“A profit-driven industry does not invest in products for markets that cannot pay,” she said. “W.H.O. has been trying to make this issue visible for

ages. Now people can see for themselves.”

Dr. Chan reiterated her contention that the Ebola crisis “is the most severe acute public health emergency seen in modern times.”

Efforts to find a cure have been stepped up in recent months as the disease has spread, with a small outbreak in Nigeria and isolated cases in Mali, Senegal, Spain and the United States. At an emergency meeting in September, the United Nations Security Council declared the Ebola crisis a threat to international security.

Officials at the W.H.O. and at other public health authorities reported on Oct. 24 that they hoped to begin trials of vaccines as early as December, and that it should be known by April whether they are effective.

Researchers have been testing two experimental vaccines in healthy volunteers in the United States and in other countries outside the main outbreak region in West Africa. One has been developed by the National Institutes of Health and GlaxoSmithKline, and the other by the Canadian government and NewLink Genetics.

Testing on humans of at least five other vaccines could begin in early 2015, W.H.O. officials have said.

Doctors, nurses and other health workers have been especially susceptible to infection because of the way the disease spreads through contact with fluids. In Sierra Leone on Monday, the authorities reported that a fifth local physician had died of the disease, news agencies reported.

The secretary general of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, speaking on Monday at a news conference in Vienna, warned against what he called overly strict international restraints on the movement of health workers who are fighting Ebola.

Some countries and some states in the United States have quarantined health professionals returning from Guinea, Liberia or Sierra Leone. Other countries, including Canada and Australia, have gone further, temporarily halting the issuance of visas to citizens of the worst-affected countries.

The best way to stop this virus is to stop this virus at its source, rather than limiting for work, or restricting the movement of people or trade.” Mr.

Ban said. He called Ebola health workers “extraordinary people who are giving of themselves — they are risking their own lives.”

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