DRAFT OPINION

of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

for the Committee on Development

on the Ebola crisis: the long-term lessons and how to strengthen health systems in developing countries to prevent future crises (2014/2204(INI))

Rapporteur: Josu Juaristi Abaunz
PA_NonLeg
SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety calls on the Committee on Development, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions into its motion for a resolution:

A. whereas since the Ebola outbreak in West Africa was officially declared on 22 March 2014 in Guinea, the disease has claimed 6,387 lives in the region¹;

B. whereas the outbreak is the largest ever, and is currently affecting four countries in West Africa (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Mali), while outbreaks in Nigeria and Senegal have been declared to be over, and a separate outbreak in the DRC has also ended;

C. whereas this epidemic is unpredictable and constantly evolving;

D. whereas the worst-hit countries have received some assistance from the international community, but foreign governments have focused primarily on financing or building Ebola case-management structures, leaving it up to national authorities, local healthcare staff and NGOs to staff them;

E. whereas, across the region, there are still no adequate facilities in the locations required for isolating and diagnosing patients; whereas in many places in West Africa, coordination is an issue, resulting in serious gaps in the response;

F. whereas other elements that are essential to an Ebola response – such as awareness-raising and community acceptance, safe burials, contact tracing, alerts and surveillance, access to health care for non-Ebola patients – are still lacking in parts of West Africa;

G. whereas clinical trials for different treatments should be starting soon in West Africa;

H. whereas international financial aid was slow in the first instance and ill-adapted later on, encumbered by serious bottlenecks in terms of staffing;

1. Deplores the loss of lives in the region devastated by the Ebola outbreak and expresses its sincere condolences to the governments of the countries and to the people affected by the outbreak;

2. Requires the Member States and the Commission to coordinate and strengthen medical research and the production of efficient medicines and vaccines against Ebola, and to advance the necessary clinical trials for existing candidate treatments;

3. Considers that the response of the Member States and the Commission has been slow and insufficient, and that financial support was shy and did not respond to the severity of the alerts that NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières and others have launched since the beginning of the epidemic; considers that the scaling-up of the Commission’s financial commitment should be stronger in terms of humanitarian and development aid to respond to the crisis; considers it necessary to increase the availability and the volume of financial

¹ WHO data as at 10 December 2014.
resources;

4. Calls on the Commission to put in place control systems to ensure that the entire budget allocated to stopping the Ebola outbreak is actually used to fight the epidemic in the countries affected by the virus and not for other purposes;

5. Stresses that the current crisis cannot be solved by health systems alone, but that a concerted approach involving different sectors (healthcare, education and training, sanitation, food aid, drinking water) is needed to address the critical gaps in all essential services; stresses that education, understood in a comprehensive way (also covering the cultural dimension and beliefs of these countries), and not only in terms of understanding and addressing the current Ebola outbreak, is key;

6. Congratulates the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), partner organisations and non-governmental humanitarian organisations, such as Médecins Sans Frontières, for their work done on the ground and warmly welcomes their extensive input and help in controlling this outbreak;

7. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to strengthen the health systems in the West African countries affected; stresses that Ebola is definitely a disease with a high mortality rate, but that there are other fatal diseases in the area that should be treated as well (such as malaria); considers that the EU should invest in and encourage capacity building in the field in order to address the problem of the weak health systems, so that local staff may be provided with the training and adequate resources to face future epidemics (Ebola or any other illness); considers that the efforts of third party donors should be channelled into building up capacity in the field;

8. Calls for educational and informative actions to be taken to raise awareness of symptoms and preventive measures in order to facilitate trust and popular cooperation with anti-Ebola measures, as information and communication constitute an important aspect of the fight against the Ebola outbreak; points out that the situation created in some Member States following the arrival of possible cases of Ebola has shown that a campaign of information and more effective communication is needed in Europe;

9. Encourages taking immediate action to coordinate and strengthen medical research and the production of efficient medicines and vaccines against Ebola and to carry out scrupulous infection control;

10. Requires all actors involved in the response to take a much more flexible approach and allocate resources according to the most pressing needs at any given time and place.