

WHO, CDC heads warn of Ebola epidemic's dangers

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In a notable address delivered Monday, the World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan defined the ongoing Ebola epidemic as “unquestionably the most severe acute public health emergency in modern times.”

Noting the potentially devastating outcomes if the crisis is not stopped soon, she stated that the Ebola crisis threatened “the very survival of societies and governments in already very poor countries.”

The warning from the head of the WHO on the unprecedented nature of the crisis points to the failed response from the United States and other imperialist powers and the incapacity of the existing economic system, capitalism, to deal with the unfolding disaster. The conditions of vast economic inequality and deep poverty that have provided an opening for the virus to spread are the direct result of the imperialist exploitation of Africa.

Chan made clear that the Ebola epidemic highlighted the vast social and economic inequalities between the world's rich few and the masses, saying, “The rich get the best care. The poor are left to die.” She warned that the Ebola outbreak in West Africa could no longer be ignored in a globalized society so fundamentally interconnected. “[W]hen a deadly and dreaded virus hits the destitute and spirals out of control, the whole world is put at risk,” she said.

She also pointed out the fact that it is the profit motive, the driving force of capitalism, that has hindered the development of a vaccine for the deadly virus: “Ebola emerged nearly 40 years ago. Why are clinicians still empty-handed, with no vaccines and no cure? Because Ebola has been, historically, geographically confined to poor African nations. The R&D incentive is virtually nonexistent. A profit-driven industry does not invest in products for markets that

cannot pay.”

“[T]he world is ill-prepared to respond to any severe, sustained and threatening public health emergency,” she concluded.

Chan's speech highlights the completely reckless and irresponsible reaction of the world powers to the Ebola crisis and the real threat it poses outside the borders of Africa. The response of the Obama administration is driven not by a desire to halt the epidemic and cure Ebola, but rather by a geopolitical agenda that involves deployment of thousands of troops and the development of a foothold on the continent for the US military's Africa Command (AFRICOM).

On Monday Tom Frieden, the director of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), told reporters that he “would not be surprised if we did see additional cases in health care workers who also provided care to the index patient,” at the Texas Presbyterian Hospital in Dallas.

A nurse who tended to Thomas Eric Duncan, the first patient to die in the US after contracting Ebola in Liberia, was diagnosed with the virus over the week. The CDC still does not know exactly how she became infected. According to the CDC, a large number of health care workers at the Dallas hospital are now possibly infected as a result of the latest case.

Frieden told reporters that, in light of the latest infection in the US, the CDC would be working more closely with state health agencies and hospitals to raise awareness of Ebola and develop their ability to respond.

He also apologized for remarks made earlier in the week that seemed to blame the nurse for her infection due to a possible mistake in the removal of her protective suit. “I spoke about a breach in protocol, because that's what we speak about in public health

when we talk about what needs to happen,” Frieden said. “Some interpreted that as finding fault with the hospital or the health care worker. I’m sorry if that was the impression given. That was certainly not my intention.”

Also on Monday, President Obama held a meeting to discuss the preparedness of the national health care system for dealing with current and future cases of Ebola. He met with Frieden, Sylvia Burwell, the secretary of Health and Human Services, Susan Rice, his national security adviser, and Lisa Monaco, the assistant to the president for homeland security and counterterrorism.

Obama ordered the CDC to begin an investigation into the infection of the nurse in Dallas and to undertake a review of procedures for treating Ebola patients. He also called for the establishment and enforcement of strict protocols for dealing with Ebola patients.



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