Ebola and the Spread of Epidemics: How can the UN help?

Hi, I'm Elliot Stanton and I will be chairing Health II along with Rachel Fox and Paolo Bova. I'm somewhat of a newcomer to MUN having only started towards the end of last year. This will be my first time chairing and I'm incredibly excited to be doing so. Hopefully everyone will have a great time. Anyone new to MUN will be in the same boat as me, so try not to feel too nervous. I think that if we all try and contribute something it will be great!

The Problem
With the global population increasing rapidly, the threat of epidemic causing diseases is greater than ever. The ability to travel across the world with ease in modern times has vastly aided the spread of diseases. Far easier ways exist nowadays to travel from country to country than in previous times. Although medical advances are continuously in an ever more urbanised population is providing the ideal starting point of a worldwide epidemic. The over-prescription of many antibiotics is opening up the very real threat of so-called 'superbugs' such as MRSA spreading to a vast number of people.

One key recent event regarding epidemics is the outbreak of Ebola virus in West Africa. The outbreak initially began in 2013 in Guinea. It has since spread to Liberia and Sierra Leone. Other isolated cases have occurred however the virus has not gained a foothold in these countries. Currently numbers of cases/deaths are thought to have been greatly under reported, with the possibility of up to 2.5 times more cases and deaths than stated in the news. A fatality rate of 71% makes this an incredibly deadly disease. Ebola is spread by the contact of an infected person's bodily fluid. Symptoms of the disease include: the sudden onset of fever/fatigue, muscle pain and headache. This is followed by vomiting, diarrhoea, rash, symptoms of impaired kidney and liver function, and in some cases, both internal and external bleeding.

Why was this allowed to happen?
At the time of writing this BP, nowhere near enough has been done to prevent Ebola from spreading. This is largely due to the fact that action against the disease was not taken soon enough and thus it has become increasingly difficult to control. This may have been down to a lack of knowledge of the outbreak or a lack of concern that should have initially surrounded it. The disease was initially under reported, meaning that global and local authorities were not monitoring, or more importantly not trying to stop Ebola spreading until it became a major international problem.

Anthony Banbury, Chief of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) has said that still not enough is being done to stop the spread of the disease.

More resources were required from the start, which would have made handling the disease a far easier task. Suspicion in affected countries of health workers and the government is causing it to be challenging to provide healthcare to Ebola sufferers. Protesters have reportedly attacked hospitals. Many affected areas lack running water and have a vast shortage of health workers, leading to heightened chances of health workers becoming infected. In August the World Health Organization (WHO) stated that 10% of deaths were health workers.
What is now being done to counter this?
The UN global Ebola crisis response team has so far set out five goals for itself. These are:

- Stop the outbreak
- Treat the infected
- Ensure essential services
- Preserve stability
- Prevent further outbreaks

On September 18th the UN Security Council voted unanimously to adopt a Security Council resolution, which urged member states to provide more resources to countries in need. This was the first resolution in the history of the Security Council to be adopted in response to a public health crisis. The UNMEER is also the first ever mission for a public health emergency. The UNMEER work directly with both local governments and other member states to help provide disease control. The WHO is also having a huge role in the control of the virus.

Previously, on the 28th of August roadmap plan was proposed that focussed on immediate actions to support the three countries with the disease and preparing countries that are at risk. Aid from the world food program of the UN is also greatly helping affected countries, as many people living in restricted travel areas are unable to get hold of food. A number of governments have so far put measures in place to protect their populations. Popular belief is that there has not been enough coordination between states on the spending used to fight the disease. The UN’s trust fund of $1 billion has so far fallen drastically short of its target. This was aimed at being a flexible spending reserve to combat the disease.

Possible Means to Prevent Events such as this from Happening Again:
At the moment, there are no effective means of coping with the epidemic outbreak. Whenever an epidemic occurs it comes as a shock and so becomes increasingly difficult to contain. Some suggestions as to how to deal with future outbreaks are:

- Develop a specialised permanent task force whose main priorities would be to communicate and document cases of infectious diseases within countries where less medical examination occurs.
- Put in place more proactive methods of dealing with disease outbreaks so that the ‘snowball’ effect which is happening with this Ebola outbreak cannot be replicated.
- Create a suggested plan of action taking into account various factors dependent on the disease and so on. This would allow for better organisation from the international community in case of future epidemics.
- Provide LEDC’s with strategies and equipment/facilities that will allow them to better deal with future outbreaks and possibly alleviate the need for huge amounts of foreign aid when dealing with highly infectious diseases.
- Create stricter guidelines regarding the reporting of infectious diseases.
- Create a set reserve fund up to be used only in times of global health crisis in order to provide immediate funding to the control of infectious diseases.
What to do now?
If you could manage to submit a country position paper to me for the 27th of February it would be amazing. Little effort is required and it will put you in the running for a reward. A country position paper is simply a brief of around 50 words outlining the Delegate's country's view of each of the topics for debate in Committee. Can you please email this to me at estanton10@gwc.org.uk

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