

Countries scramble to make up for 'precious time' lost in Ebola fight (Update)

September 15 2014, by Catherine Boitard

The European Union urged the international community Monday to boost aid to make up for "precious time" lost in the response to west Africa's deadly Ebola outbreak, as the UN Security Council announced an emergency meeting on the crisis.

The worst-ever Ebola contagion has killed more than 2,400 people in west Africa since it erupted earlier this year and aid agencies deplore an inadequate international response to an emergency that shows no sign of abating.

The United Nations said last week that Ebola cases are multiplying "faster than the capacity to manage them" and the president of Liberia, with more than half the victims, has warned the outbreak is destroying the country's social fabric.

The UN Security Council will hold an emergency session on Thursday to discuss ways to ramp up the global response to the epidemic, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, Samantha Power, announced in New York.

The United Nations is appealing for \$600 million (465 million euros) for supplies, with countries asked to send doctors, nurses, beds, trucks, equipment and other vehicles to the affected nations.

"Our collective response to date has not been sufficient," said Power, whose country holds the presidency of the 15-member council this

month.

"The situation on the ground is dire and is growing worse by the day."

Several months into the crisis, an international response is beginning to get on track, with both the European Union and the United States stepping up plans to make up the lost ground.

"We are behind the curve and for a reason," EU Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Kristalina Georgieva said at the special talks in Brussels to devise a Europe-wide response to the outbreak.

"When the warning signs were there, it took some time for the international community to pay attention. Precious time was lost."

To make up the ground, the commission last week announced 150 million euros (\$195 million) in aid to fight the crisis and Georgieva on Monday urged member states to add more.

'Important moment'

The United States is also set to raise its response.

On Tuesday, US President Barack Obama will ask Congress to approve a request for \$88 million to help tackle the outbreak.

Obama will also travel to Atlanta to meet medical authorities at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a hub for Ebola research, and announce new aid to affected regions in west Africa.

The Pentagon has already announced it will send a 25-bed field hospital to Liberia and the US military could help direct supplies, set up tent hospitals and deploy medical personnel needed to isolate and treat those

suffering with the disease.

"This is an important moment in the fight against Ebola," said French Health Minister Marisol Touraine in Brussels, adding that France was also to set up a treatment centre in Guinea.

At the EU meeting, a dozen countries offered to boost aid, including Ireland and Germany.

EU officials meanwhile urged countries not to give in to fear.

"We must isolate the disease, but not the country," said Tonio Borg, the EU's Health Commissioner.

He was referring to international airlines that have cut links to the affected countries, which also include Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The call was echoed by Ghanaian President John Dramani Mahama, who during a visit to Monrovia on Monday called for an end to measures "taken in panic".

"I believe that as long as all of us are implementing appropriate measures, we can allow normal economic activities to take place," said Mahama, who also heads the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The tropical Ebola virus can fell its victims within days, causing severe fever and muscle pain, weakness, vomiting and diarrhoea—in some cases shutting down organs and causing unstoppable bleeding.

No widely available vaccine or treatment exists but health experts are looking at fast-tracking two potential vaccines and eight treatments,

including the drug ZMapp.

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