

After Ebola, UN must prepare for next deadly outbreak: Ban

December 22 2014

The United Nations must learn lessons from the Ebola crisis and begin preparing now for the next outbreak of deadly disease, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said Monday.

Returning from a visit to Ebola-hit countries, Ban also called for recovery efforts to be stepped up in West Africa to rebuild shattered economies, get children back in school and begin caring for Ebola orphans.

"We must learn the lessons of Ebola, which go well beyond strengthening public health systems," Ban told reporters at UN headquarters.

"The international community needs better early warning and rapid response."

The UN chief said he will launch a serious effort to "explore what more we can do to stay ahead of the next outbreak of disease—a test that is sure to come."

Ban traveled to Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the epicenter of the year-long Ebola epidemic that has killed more than 6,900 people. He also traveled to Mali, which has had a recent outbreak and Ghana, headquarters of the UN Ebola Emergency Mission.

His call to take stock of the Ebola response followed sharp criticism

from non-governmental organisations that the United Nations, in particular the World Health Organization, were too slow to swing into action.

The outbreak began in December in Guinea but it took nine months for the United Nations to decide to set up an emergency mission and to press for international mobilization to beat back the virus.

Diplomats have pointed the finger at the WHO for failing to quickly raise the alarm, but there has also been some soul-searching over funding cuts at the UN agency that have forced it to reduce its scope of action.

Ban said scaling up recovery efforts in West Africa was one of four urgent steps needed to address the Ebola crisis.

He also cited the need to adapt the response by chasing the virus in remote areas of West Africa and looking at isolated chains of transmission.

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Citation: After Ebola, UN must prepare for next deadly outbreak: Ban (2014, December 22) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-12-ebola-deadly-outbreak.html>

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