

# Global Ebola conference seeks end to W.Africa outbreak

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Leaders of Ebola-hit countries in west Africa will attend an international conference in Brussels Tuesday to mobilise a final push to end the outbreak and ensure the delivery of nearly \$5 billion in aid pledges.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma and Alpha Conde of Guinea, the three countries hardest hit by the epidemic, will be joined by top officials from around the world for the EU-backed meeting.

The conference comes as Sierra Leone's vice president remains in self-imposed quarantine after one of his bodyguards died from Ebola amid a recent spike in cases following a long decline.

"It will be a very difficult and painstaking task," UN Ebola envoy David Nabarro told a briefing on the eve of the conference.

More than 9,500 people have died of the disease since the west African epidemic emerged in southern Guinea in December 2013.

Nabarro said the number of new cases had declined from around 900 a week to 100, but that cases appeared to be climbing back up in the coastal regions of Sierra Leone and Guinea.

Officials from the European Union, China, the United States, Cuba and Australia will be in Brussels alongside the United Nations, the World Bank and other international organisations trying to wipe out the disease

in west Africa.

"The purpose of this conference is getting to zero" in terms of human cases, an EU official involved in the talks said separately, but added: "The curve is flattening out, but definitely it is not at zero."

## **Rebuilding economies**

Nonetheless, officials acknowledged there was less alarm about Ebola this year than a few months ago when people feared it could spread to Europe or other parts of Africa.

In fact, another EU official said, Nigeria, Senegal and Mali have all managed to show that Ebola cases can be reduced to zero after they too were hit by the virus.

Officials said countries around the world have so far pledged \$4.9 billion to fight Ebola, with \$2.4 billion disbursed until now.

"This conference is not really a pledging conference but rather an occasion to take stock to urge countries that have not yet disbursed to disburse what they have actually already pledged," one official said.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank will then host a conference in April in Washington to see if there are still financial gaps, followed by another called by the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in May, Nabarro said.

EU officials organising the Brussels event said the conference will also focus on how to revive economic development in west Africa.

According to World Bank estimates, the countries at the centre of the Ebola epidemic are forecast to lose 12 percent of their combined [gross](#)

[domestic product](#) this year.

In addition, their health sectors have been partially wiped out by the epidemic or forced to divert resources to fighting Ebola at the expense of other diseases like measles, malaria and AIDS.

Ebola, one of the deadliest pathogens known to man, is spread through direct contact with the bodily fluids of an infected person showing symptoms such as fever or vomiting.

EU officials said a total of 60 delegations will be attending the [conference](#), including one led by Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe.

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