

Merkel: Global catastrophe plan needed after Ebola crisis

May 18 2015, by Kirsten Grieshaber



German Chancellor Angela Merkel, speaks during the opening of the 68th World Health Assembly at the European headquarters of the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, Monday, May 18, 2015. (Jean-Christophe Bott/Keystone via AP)

The Ebola crisis in western Africa showed the world in a painful way that a global catastrophe plan is needed to deal with future epidemics, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Monday.

"The struggle (against Ebola) is only won if there are no new cases and if we have learned the lessons from this crisis: we should have reacted earlier," Merkel told the 68th World Health Assembly in Geneva.

The World Health Organization has been criticized for its slow response to early warnings about the Ebola outbreak.

More than 11,000 people have died in the outbreak since the first cases became public in rural Guinea in March 2014.

Merkel said that WHO structures need to become more efficient, suggesting that the organization has to become more centralized.

An independent panel of experts is currently looking into the WHO's slow response to early warnings about the Ebola outbreak.

The panel said last week in its first report that "deep and substantial" change is needed at the World Health Organization. After studying what went wrong in the WHO's response to the Ebola crisis, the panel said it's still not clear why the global body took so long to heed warnings.

Looking forward, the chancellor said Germany would give 200 million euros (\$228 million) to help developing countries build up better-functioning health care systems—which she said was essential to deal with future epidemic outbreaks. She said 70 million euros of this would go specifically to the Ebola-ridden countries in western Africa.

"If we react faster, and act faster, we will manage to better prevent a crisis like Ebola the next time," Merkel told the assembly, which is the WHO's decision-making body. It is attended by delegations of all WHO member states and meets annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

Ebola continues to spread in Guinea and Sierra Leone, while Liberia was

declared Ebola-free earlier this month.

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Citation: Merkel: Global catastrophe plan needed after Ebola crisis (2015, May 18) retrieved 7 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-05-merkel-global-catastrophe-ebola-crisis.html>

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