

WHO shake-up approved after Ebola debacle

May 26 2015

The World Health Organization got the go-ahead Tuesday for a sweeping shake-up, including a \$100-million war chest to battle future emergencies following the Ebola fiasco.

Delegates from 180 countries at the annual World Health Assembly, which ended Tuesday, approved plans for a contingency fund to tackle future emergencies, which will be reviewed after two years.

The pilot project will be financed by "flexible voluntary contributions", according to WHO chief Margaret Chan.

The WHO has drawn biting criticism for its delayed response to the Ebola crisis and its failure to identify the outbreak which has killed 11,132 people so far, almost all of them in west Africa.

Participants at the world's biggest public health gathering, which brought together 3,000 delegates, also approved WHO plans for deep reforms to respond better to future crises.

This "will be guided by an all-hazards [health](#) emergency approach, that emphasizes adaptability, flexibility and accountability, humanitarian principles, predictability, timeliness and country ownership," a statement said.

The new programme will also coordinate a new global [health emergency](#) workforce, called for during a rare emergency session of WHO's executive board in January.

The skills of WHO's emergency staff will also be boosted with the addition of logisticians, medical anthropologists and experts in risk communication.

The measures came as the WHO warned on Tuesday that the Ebola outbreak was far from over and could persist throughout the course of the year.

Although Liberia was recently declared Ebola-free, neighbouring Sierra Leone and Guinea were miles away from that status, Bruce Aylward, WHO's Assistant Director for Emergencies, told reporters.

He said the target "in a best case scenario" would be September, but this was not the case as the two countries also had to face the region's torrential rainy season, which would greatly hamper Ebola fire-fighting efforts.

"It will be a very bumpy road. We've got to keep on planning till the end of 2015," he said.

Aylward said there was a huge gap in funding with WHO being forced to drastically slash its budget from March until the year's end from \$350 million as it had received only about \$150 million so far.

The assembly also approved WHO's plans to help combat the misuse of antibiotics. The strategy includes stronger surveillance and more research to stop bugs becoming immune to existing drugs.

WHO has warned that without urgent action, the world could be headed for "a post-antibiotic era" in which common infections and minor injuries that have long been treatable once again become killers.

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