

DRC must unite in Ebola fight amid 'high' risk of spread: WHO chief

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The World Health Organization chief on Monday urged different political factions in the Democratic Republic of Congo to unite in the battle against Ebola, warning that the risk of spread "remains very high".

"Ebola does not take sides. It is the enemy of everybody," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the opening of the organisation's annual assembly in Geneva.

Nearly 1,200 people have died since last August, when the DRC declared a 10th outbreak of Ebola in the country in 40 years.

Efforts to roll back the outbreak have been hampered by fighting in the affected regions and attacks on medical teams, as well as locals who view the [international effort](#) at prevention with suspicion.

Tedros said he had met with the DRC's president and with opposition leaders "to urge a bipartisan approach to ending this outbreak."

"Unless we unite to end this outbreak we run the risk it will become more widespread and more expansive and more aggressive," he said.

The WHO chief hailed that efforts to rein in the virus, including the vaccination of more than 120,000 people, have so far succeeded in limiting the outbreak to the conflict-wracked North Kivu province and neighbouring Ituri region of the DRC.

But, he warned, "I emphasise 'so far'. The risk of spread remains very high."

Tedros described the outbreak as "one of the most complex health emergencies any of us have ever faced", pointing for instance to the dozens of attacks on [health facilities](#) in North Kivu since the start of the year.

"We are not just fighting a virus," he insisted.

"We're fighting insecurity. We're fighting violence. We're fighting misinformation... and we're fighting the politicisation of an outbreak."

"Every attack gives the virus an advantage."

The current [outbreak](#) is the second deadliest on record, after an epidemic that killed more than 11,300 people in West Africa in 2014-16.

During his address, Tedros stressed that Ebola is not the only health crisis facing the global health community, listing recent major cholera outbreaks in Yemen, diphtheria in the Cox's Bazaar camps in Bangladesh and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria, among others.

He urged WHO's member states to endorse the organisation's "ambitious budget", stressing the "[moral duty](#) to respond urgently and effectively to outbreaks and other emergencies", and urging more spending on [preventive measures](#).

Tedros also announced the appointment of four new so-called goodwill ambassadors for promoting global health, including Cynthia Germanotta, a mental [health](#) advocate and the mother of superstar Lady Gaga.

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