

EU sharply increases aid for Ebola-hit West Africa

September 5 2014, by Lachlan Carmichael

The European Union on Friday announced 140 million euros (\$183 million) in funds to fight the deadly Ebola virus in West Africa, a sharp increase over its previous pledge as the outbreak worsens.

The EU commission said the aid was necessary to help stop the "worst ever outbreak of the epidemic" from ravaging Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Nigeria.

"Today the commission is unveiling a 140-million-euro package of funding for all the countries currently affected by the Ebola virus," said David Sharrock, spokesman for the Humanitarian Aid Commission, at a briefing.

The aid is designed to boost overstretched health services, fund mobile laboratories for detecting the disease, safeguard the provision of food, water and sanitation as well as help the broader economy and strengthen overall public services.

"An essential part of halting the epidemic is getting support to the [health services](#)," said Sharrock.

About a third of the assistance would go towards strengthening healthcare systems in affected countries, he said.

Sharrock said the EU had previously committed 12 million euros in aid to fight Ebola, with the sharp increase reflecting the gravity of the crisis.

"A crisis caused by the Ebola virus is threatening the entire region. This is the worst outbreak ever of the epidemic," Sharrock said.

The World Health Organization put the official Ebola death toll at 1,841, out of a total of 3,685 cases in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Kristalina Georgieva, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, said the situation in the Ebola zone was "going from bad to worse."

"We are helping make a difference on the ground, but the needs are outpacing the international community's capacity to react," she said in a statement.

"We need to pool our efforts and provide adequate air transportation and medical equipment to our partners in order to fight this menace."

The formal announcement of the increased aid was made by Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs, during a trip to Benin.

Eight million of the funds pledged Friday were included in the previous 12 million euro commitment, EU officials said.

Several European specialists have already been deployed to Guinea and Nigeria to run mobile laboratories that help detect cases of Ebola, the officials added. Another team is due to arrive in Liberia next week.

The EU's executive said last month that the risk of Ebola across the European Union remained "extremely low" despite the WHO's decision to declare it an international health emergency.

At a summit in Brussels last week, the EU's 28 leaders called for better coordination of assistance made by member states and requested that airlines keep links to the affected countries still running.

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