

Agenda Item 14.8: Ebola Virus Disease outbreak

DG, honourable delegates and colleagues. WaterAid welcomes the efforts of WHO in the fight against Ebola and the results achieved so far. While the worst may seem to be over, the consequences and effects on the lives of people in affected countries and its environs will remain for a long time to come. This is coupled with the fact that there is very little to show that efforts are underway to avoid its reoccurrence.

Although we have seen a welcome emphasis on the need for strengthening health systems, more needs to be done to match the rhetoric with action. Over the past year, the improvement in access to health services has been very minimal and suggests a business-as-usual approach, that risks a return of this fatal disease.

It is therefore important that first, the affected countries develop a cross-national health systems strengthening strategy with a clear financing plan that ensures mutual collaboration and support, especially as these countries share porous borders and homogenous communities that cut across these countries.

Second, safe water, improved hygiene and sanitation approaches were pivotal in mitigating the spread of Ebola and saving lives. Therefore, a plan that includes equitable and sustainable access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene will be critical to saving lives in the future and reducing curative financing costs.

Finally, aid for health systems strengthening must include transfer of knowledge and skills for planning, monitoring and accountability. The outbreak of such diseases can be avoided and it is important that the political will remains, but health systems strengthening must not be politicized.