

ADDRESS OF COM (DR) AYUBA P. WABBA mni, NATIONAL PRESIDENT, MEDICAL AND HEALTH WORKERS' UNION OF NIGERIA TO THE 1-DAY TRAINING THE TRAINERS NATIONAL WORKSHOP AND FORMAL LAUNCHING OF THE WHO *INTERIM INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL GUIDANCE FOR HEALTH-CARE WORKERS*, HELD ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 2014, AT THE MAIN AUDITORIUM OF THE SHEHU MUSA YAR'ADUA CENTRE, CBD, ABUJA

PROTOCOL:

I welcome you all, from across the length and breadth of our great country Nigeria, on this matter of urgent national disquiet, which is the curbing of the spread of the Ebola Virus Disease. As citizens, we are and indeed should be concerned with the worrisome waves this dreaded scourge is making. As health workers, being the first line of defence of the national response, we are doubly so concerned.

This is the reason why our great union, Medical and Health Workers' Union which has distinguished itself as a leading pro-active union that places the defence of membership at the top of its priority list, as well as the challenge of building an effective national health-care system is organising this national workshop today.

Before going further, there is every need to commend the Federal Government of Nigeria and particularly the President of the Federation, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, and the Honourable Minister of Health, Prof. Onyebuchi Chukwu for the apt and appropriate efforts made so far in establishing a robust national response, which was encapsulated in detail at the presentation of the minister to the 2nd emergency session of the National Council on Health, on the Ebola Virus Disease.

We never shy away from pointing out when things are going wrong, particularly in defence of our members' rights. We should therefore also not shy away from saying "well done" when government and its functionaries are taking the right steps. So we say "kudos", even as we once more elaborate on how these right steps could be consolidated on, by all of us.

UNDERSTANDING EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE

Due largely to the efforts of the Federal and some State governments which we alluded to above in the wake of the index case of the Liberian, Mr. Patrick Sawyer, there is now a great deal of knowledge on the characteristics and modes of transmission of the Ebola Virus Disease in the public domain.

It is important to stress the fact that EVD's early symptoms are very much like those of non-haemorrhagic fevers like malaria and typhoid. This

calls for both increased care in tackling these fevers which are relatively endemic in our environment, while eschewing stigmatisation and discrimination in providing health care services.

It has been established that the main mode of transmission of the disease is through uninfected persons contact with the blood or body fluids of infected persons, their remains or surfaces contaminated with such infected fluids. This is particularly so where the uninfected persons has broken skin or mucous membrane, but could also be through skin pores.

THE SPREAD OF EVD AND THE HEALTH-CARE WORKER

The virulence of the Ebola Virus Disease is such that it is estimated that 90% of infected cases could result in fatality, especially when prompt treatment is not taken. It is thus of the utmost importance that priority be given to prevention and control.

Thus far, 2,615 persons have been infected out of which 1,427 have died. Health-care workers are particularly vulnerable due to the nature of healthcare delivery as attested to by the World Health Organisation. Indeed, more than 240 health-care workers have become infected across West Africa since the advent of this, the deadliest outbreak ever of the disease.

Out of this, 120, representing a whopping 50% have died, as stated in the recently press release of the World Health Organisation titled "unprecedented toll that Ebola is taking on health workers". In Sierra Leone for example, 3 doctors and 37 other health professionals have been killed by the infection

In Nigeria as at today, there have been 16 confirmed cases. Out of these, there have been six reported casualties, and not less than three have been health-care providers. The need for protection, action and solidarity by and with health workers has never been more pressing, which is why the theme of this workshop is *Fighting Ebola Together: Protection, Action, Solidarity*.

HEALTH-CARE WORKERS, OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH: THE CHALLENGE OF INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL IN HEALTH-CARE SETTINGS

With this realisation, the World Health Organisation has issued a booklet titled: *Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Care of Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Filovirus Haemorrhagic Fever in Health-care Settings, with Focus on Ebola*, in August 2014. And on the heels of this, as well, on August 28, it also rolled out the *Ebola Response Roadmap*.

In these it notes the “alarming ways” in which “the 2014 Ebola Virus Disease (EVD or “Ebola”) continues to evolve”. And it particularly stressed the critical place of health-care workers in curtailing the spread of the scourge and the need for them to be very well protected to be able to do this safely and effectively.

While all health-workers are at risk and should safeguard against infection, there are some cadres that are even more at risk due to the higher probability of their coming in contact with patients included those that might be infected with the Ebola virus. These include all our members working in the following departments: medical laboratory; health information; community health; laundry; nursing care; clinical services, and; environmental health.

There is every need for extra care to be taken by these cadres of health-care workers and indeed all health-care workers. The WHO guidance booklet will be of immense value for this, which is why we are making copies available to all state councils and branches of the union. Access to this must be available to all our members.

We also seize this opportunity to call on governments at all levels for improved funding of healthcare delivery. It is possible for gloves, face masks and other protective personal equipment to be aptly used only when they are readily available in adequate quantities and quality.

We equally call for governments at all levels to follow the steps taken by the Federal Government in immediately recruiting hundreds of health-care workers to boost the port health system. There is a dire need for more health-care workers to be employed for us to wage a concerted war against Ebola and for improved health care delivery in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Comrades, colleagues and friends, what we face in Nigeria and indeed across West Africa and the world at large is a public health emergency of the most horrendous proportion. Nothing is too much to be done to win this war against the Ebola virus.

We must be forthright and protect ourselves to ensure victory. As unionists, we are used to struggle. This struggle is for us all and for the survival of our loved ones and fellow citizens.

It is apt at this point in time to stress the need for hastening the passing of the National Health Bill, which the House of Representatives has rigorously worked on a apt draft of. We thus call on the distinguished senate to take a cue from this, as a National Health Act would serve as an institutionalised beacon for addressing such health emergencies as that which we now face with the spread of the Ebola Virus Disease.

As we face the battle to curb and stop Ebola, we must and will do this with love. Stigmatisation is not an option, **protection, action and solidarity**, is the way forward.

In conclusion, we seize this opportunity to commend the Public Services International, the Global Union Federation representing over 24 million health and other public services workers across 120 countries and territories, for being on top of the situation in engaging with the World Health Organisation in the world-wide efforts to curb the spread of the Ebola Virus Disease.

We also salute all member-unions of the West African Health Sector Unions' Network, which I have the honour and privilege of leading, and which was one of the first international body in the sub-region to raise an outcry on the scourge of Ebola, at the beginning of the year.

Standing together as workers, and with other social partners, we will win.

Thank you.