

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing on  
“Combating Ebola in West Africa: The International Response”  
November 13, 2014**

**(As Prepared for Delivery)**

The Committee will come to order. The Ebola epidemic in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone is unprecedented in scale and in reach. Already, over 14,000 cases have been reported – making it by far the worst ever outbreak. Over 5,000 people have died and thousands of children have been orphaned. These numbers are shocking – and growing.

If efforts to break the chain of transmission fail, Ebola will continue to spill across borders, economies will be devastated, governments will fail, and tens of thousands will die. That’s no exaggeration. That means this isn’t just a problem for West Africa, but it’s a problem with far-reaching health, economic, and security consequences.

I’d like to recognize Chairman Smith for convening an emergency hearing during the African Leader’s Summit in August, despite concerns by the Administration that it would be a “distraction.” President Sirleaf of Liberia called to thank the Committee for standing by Liberia. Chairman Smith, who has been working closely with Ranking Member Bass, will convene a hearing next week with the key nongovernmental organizations engaged in the response.

Unfortunately, we are paying the price for early failures. The World Health Organization, the U.N. agency charged with leading the response to health emergencies, repeatedly downplayed the crisis. Inept country office directors ignored warnings by Doctors Without Borders, refused assistance from the Centers for Disease Control and USAID, and blocked entry for teams of experts. By the time WHO finally sounded the alarm on August 8<sup>th</sup>, the outbreak was out of control.

Of course, the United States has generously provided support to the WHO. This was a failure of policy – not resources. Our Director of the Centers for Disease Control serves on WHO’s executive board. We need to be pushing to reform the organization - improving accountability would be a good place to start.

In contrast to WHO’s failures, USAID immediately activated a Disaster Assistance Response team and got people to the region. Today, USAID, supported by the Department of Defense and CDC, is leading a robust disaster response. As we will hear from Administrator Shah, treatment units are being opened, lab capacity is being expanded, medical workers are being trained, and burials teams are working to reduce transmission. Reports from Liberia indicate that this is having impact. None of this could be done without the commitment and sacrifice of the brave men and women – civilians and uniformed personnel alike – who have answered the call for help.

But we cannot afford to let up, and we cannot afford to do this alone. Containment will fail in the absence of a robust international effort. Other donors and the UN need to step up, particularly in Guinea. The WHO needs to be part of the solution, rather than a hindrance. And our Embassies need to put in place additional, prudent, containment measures that will add a layer of protection while not impeding the Ebola response, including a temporary suspension of visas for non-U.S. nationals.

We look forward to learning more about the international efforts to help contain the Ebola epidemic at its source, and evaluating the Administration's request for additional resources in this fight to address one of the most pressing health emergencies of our time.

I now turn to the Ranking Member for any opening remarks.