

# Terre des Hommes

## International Federation

*For children, their rights  
and equitable development*

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Statement by Terre Des Hommes International Federation

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With more than 3'000 deaths and after months of slow, fragmented responses, the international community has recognised Ebola as a public health emergency of international concern and a clear threat to global health security.

Media coverage of Ebola has, understandably, been prolific and plays an important role in updating the public opinion and putting pressure on decision makers at global level. However, it has also encouraged substantial misunderstanding about the risks of exposure and where the real threat and causes of Ebola lie. Whilst insufficient accurate information has been given about the root causes and prevention of Ebola, few confirmed cases in high income countries are repeatedly referred to by the media.

As also a consequence of this, several countries have now suspended arrivals from Ebola-hit West African nations to try to prevent the virus from crossing its borders. The countries are claiming that language barriers and funeral rites make those travellers an unacceptable risk.

Tough border measures as those are detrimental and ineffective. Visa suspensions could give countries a false sense of security and even increase uncontrolled immigration from the affected areas which is much riskier.

These border measures also place additional pressure on the countries facing Ebola outbreaks, while complicating travel to and from the affected countries by aid workers.

As recommended by WHO, affected countries should be conducting exit screening, and the rest of the world must remain vigilant so cases can be detected if they show up in other countries.

Cases of Ebola in West Africa are doubling every 2-3 weeks and the latest estimate says that up to 1.4 million people could be infected by mid-January. Previous Ebola outbreaks have been repeatedly contained at small numbers. But the scale of this current epidemic has swamped the region's weak health systems. Liberia has less than 1 doctor for every 100,000 people.

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Governments are providing funds, but there is not enough medical staff to stem the epidemic and to support the weak health systems in preventing and rapidly identifying risks.

If Ebola spirals further out of control, it could soon threaten many more people. The fact that a weak health care systems in small countries can let this virus grow to a size that threatens the world is a powerful statement of just how interdependent we are.

While there is substantial risk, there are also clear ways to contain that risk. Ebola is spread through bodily fluids, so with care, the risk of contracting it can be minimized.

An urgent donor conference must be convened to discuss the implications of the Ebola epidemic. Such a conference must end with substantial financial commitments to strengthen delivery of core public health capacities.

According to TDH, a reliable way to protect the world's population from new and dangerous epidemics is with a global approach ensuring adequate access to qualitative health for all and not by closing borders.