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UN in Ethiopia Sketches Out its Contingency Plan in the event of Influenza A H1N1 Outbreak



“No suspected case of the new **Influenza A H1N1** detected in Ethiopia so far” Dr. Fatoumata Nafo-Traoré, WHO Representative in Ethiopia, said at a town hall meeting conducted at the UNECA Conference Hall in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 19 May 2009 and attended by all UN staff in the country. She further noted that there is no confirmed case to date in Africa at large. His Excellency United Nations Under-Secretary General and Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa , Mr. Abdoulie Janneh, who chaired the meeting, told the gathering “this meeting is called to raise staff awareness to protect yourselves and your loved ones from the virus.”

Dr. Nafo-Traoré briefed the staff about the new virus, its current status, the history of influenza in general and what precautions staff should follow. According to Dr. Nafo-Traoré, **Influenza A H1N1** is

a public health threat to mankind that is caused by a virus that affects the respiratory system. It spreads among humans by air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. So far the new virus has claimed the lives of 79 people from Mexico, USA, Canada, and Costa Rica. 9,830 people from 40 countries are confirmed with laboratory investigation to have been infected by the virus.

In view of this fact the UN Security Management Team (SMT) decided to establish an in-house Crisis Management Team (CMT) with the objective of ensuring preparedness to contain and respond to a human influenza pandemic as well as business continuity during the Pandemic that outlines action points with immediate effect targeting the UN family in Addis Ababa as well as those deployed in the field.



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In addition to Power Point presentations, a short video illustrating the practical measures that should be taken to protect self and others was screened. Similarly pocket-size brochure that serves as quick reference was handed out to individuals. Agencies were provided with leaflets, posters and brochures that the Communication Group of the CMT developed in its awareness campaign.

24 hours hotline service is established to respond to any questions the staff may have. In case of emergency security warden system and SMS messaging are also in place to keep staff abreast with information and to address all issues in a concerted manner.

According to Dr. Grace Fombad, the Officer in Charge of the United Nations Health Care Centre in Addis Ababa, all necessary preparation is made. "Medical and non medical items are in place and order is placed for the ones that are missing." "Furthermore" she asserted "the clinic is preparing itself with ambulance, extra rooms, as well as referral hospitals locally". According to the team, the required money for this effect is going to be financed by member agencies.

In conclusion, Mr. Abdoulie Janneh commended the crisis management team on behalf of the UN System in Ethiopia for its efficiency in putting in place the contingency plan in a short time.. He further commended the WHO Representative in Ethiopia for its leadership and guidance to the working group in making sure that all is in place in a timely manner. "What we see here today is a result of the one UN effort, I thank you all particularly the WHO representation in Ethiopia and the CMT. Please join me in thanking the team. We can now rest assured that all is in place, and my request to you is to extend your usual cooperation to this team," he added.

The meeting was attended by the UN Resident Coordinator, UN Heads of Agency, all staff both in town and from the field. Later the meeting was followed by briefing to Area Security Coordinators to take example of the contingency plan developed centrally and come up with their own local planning so as to allow better planning that covers all staff at all corners of the country.

It is to be recalled that globally, the WHO Director General has raised the level of influenza pandemic alert to 5.

