

UN releases \$15 million to help vulnerable countries battle the spread of the coronavirus

New York/Geneva, 1 March 2020: UN Humanitarian Chief Mark Lowcock today released US\$15 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to help fund global efforts to contain the COVID-19 virus.

The announcement came as the World Health Organization (WHO) upgraded the global risk of the coronavirus outbreak to "very high" – its top level of risk assessment. The WHO has said there is still a chance of containing the virus if its chain of transmission is broken.

The sudden increases of cases in Italy, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Korea are deeply concerning. There are now cases linked to Iran in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait and Oman, along with cases linked to Italy in Algeria, Austria, Croatia, Germany, Spain and Switzerland.

The UN funding has been released to the WHO and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). It will fund essential activities including monitoring the spread of the virus, investigating cases, and the operation of national laboratories.

The WHO has called for US\$675 million to fund the fight against coronavirus. There is a window of opportunity to contain the spread of the virus if countries take robust measures to detect cases early, isolate and care for patients, and trace contacts.

Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mark Lowcock said: "We do not yet see evidence that the virus is spreading freely. As long as that's the case, we still have a chance of containing it.

"But swift and robust action must be taken to detect cases early, isolate and care for patients, and trace contacts. We must act now to stop this virus from putting more lives at risk.

"This grant from the UN's Emergency Fund will help countries with fragile health systems boost their detection and response operations. It has the potential to save the lives of millions of vulnerable people."

This is a critical juncture in the outbreak. The focus is on containing COVID-19 by strengthening surveillance, conducting thorough outbreak investigations to identify contacts and applying appropriate measures to prevent further spread.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "The potential spread of the virus to countries with weaker health systems is one of our biggest concerns. These funds will help support these countries get ready for detecting and isolating cases, protecting their health workers, and treating patients with dignity and appropriate care. This will help us save lives and push back the virus"

UNICEF is leading on preventative actions in communities across the affected countries with risk communication, providing hygiene and medical kits to schools and health clinics and monitoring the impact of the outbreak to support continuity of care, education and social services.

“At this pivotal moment, every effort must be made to push back against the outbreak,” said UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore. “These crucial funds will support our global efforts to bolster weaker health systems and inform children, pregnant women and families about how to protect themselves.”

Since it was launched in 2006, CERF has provided more than \$6 billion to over 100 countries and helped hundreds of millions of people.

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