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Director-General of the World Health Organization

Opening remarks at a WHO Ebola research and development forum
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Distinguished scientists, representatives of industry, colleagues in public health, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and a warm welcome to this high-level meeting. I thank you for your time and expertise.

The Ebola R&D effort has mobilised people, institutions and resources in ways never seen before. This is one positive outcome in an otherwise horrific human calamity.

New tools have been developed with unprecedented speed, though the window of opportunity for testing some is closing. On Saturday, WHO declared an end to the outbreak in Liberia. This is a monumental achievement in by far the worst outbreak since Ebola emerged in 1976.
Prior to the current outbreak, Ebola was considered a rare disease. Much about the disease and its causative agent was poorly understood. Your work has increased that understanding considerably. We are likely very close to having a vaccine that can protect against Ebola.

We have four rapid diagnostics to detect infection, and two of these are point-of-care. We have much more information about which therapeutic interventions may or may not work.

This is a contribution to scientific knowledge, but it is also a contribution to better preparedness. Thanks to your work, the world will be far better equipped to respond when the next Ebola outbreak inevitably occurs.

You have achieved something even bigger. What we see emerging, over a very short time, is a new model for the accelerated development, testing, and approval of new medical products during emergencies caused by any emerging or re-emerging infectious disease.
Your collaborative efforts prove that the traditional R&D model can be adapted, timeframes can be compressed, and partnerships that are otherwise unlikely can be formed.
The implications are huge. Many other serious diseases have no vaccines or therapeutic options, and some of these diseases have epidemic potential.

The job now is to harness the lessons from Ebola to create a new R&D framework that can be used for any epidemic-prone disease, in any infectious disease emergency.
This is what you will be discussing over the next two days: an R&D preparedness plan with clear rules, well-defined platforms for information sharing, and agreed procedures to expedite development and clinical trials.

In emergencies, coordination is the first essential element. Timely and transparent information sharing is the second.
The more we know about what other partners have discovered or achieved, the better equipped we will be to make informed decisions and take the right next steps with the greatest possible speed.

In this sense, the R&D response to Ebola marks an historical, ground-breaking event. Public research institutes, private funders, civil society, countries, and industry have united, in unprecedented ways, to defend the world against a deadly and deeply dreaded disease.
Many of you present today were part of this army. I hope the world will recognize what your engagement means, also as a contribution to future preparedness.

I wish you every success over the coming two days and eagerly await the outcome of your discussions.

Thank you.