28 December 2018 - WHO and partners are continuing to respond to the Ebola outbreak in North Kivu and Ituri provinces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, despite a deterioration of the security situation since yesterday morning.

Yesterday our teams in Beni were unable to carry out critical field work, including vaccinations, contact tracing, and following up on alerts of potential new cases. Protests at government buildings in Beni spilled over to an Ebola transit centre, frightening people waiting for Ebola test results and the staff who were caring for them. Staff at the centre temporarily withdrew and most suspected cases were transferred to a nearby treatment centre.

In Butembo, some alerts of potential cases were investigated and confirmed cases were referred to treatment centres but teams were unable to trace contacts or to conduct vaccinations.

Response activities have not been interrupted in other affected areas.

We have reached a critical point in the Ebola response. After an intensification of field activities, we were seeing hopeful signs in many areas, including a recent decrease in cases in Beni.

These gains could be lost if we suffer a period of prolonged insecurity, resulting in increased transmission. That would be a tragedy for the local population, who have already suffered too much.

Our teams in Beni and Butembo are doing everything possible to continue responding, despite the challenging security environment. For example, in Beni, contact tracing is being resumed with the support of local community relays, and WHO is supporting local health authorities to undertake other critical surveillance functions where possible.

In general, the communities in affected areas have been supportive of the response. We ask for everyone to protect health facilities and provide access for responders to the affected populations so that we can stop this outbreak. The population must also have safe access to transit and treatment centres that save lives and stop the spread of Ebola.

Working side by side with the Ministry of Health and our partners, our priority is to end the outbreak. We hope to return to full operations as soon as possible while remaining committed to ensuring the safety of all staff deployed. We cannot afford to take a step back at this critical point in the response.