



GOVERNMENT WHIPS' OFFICE
HOUSE OF LORDS
LONDON SW1A 0PW

BARONESS STEDMAN-SCOTT OBE DL
0207 219 3778

Telephone 020-7219 3131
www.lordswhips.org.uk
holgovernmentwhips@parliament.uk

23rd July 2019

Dear Lord Chidgey,

I am writing to address the question you posed last week following the Lord Bishop of St. Albans' Private Notice Question about Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Overall, it was a timely and welcome discussion, particularly as the next day the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

Conflict in eastern DRC has been a perennial challenge for decades but has been thrown into a spotlight of renewed intensity given the ongoing Ebola outbreak. The UK is a leading supporter of efforts to end the conflict and improve the lives of the millions of Congolese in the affected zone.

As you heard during the discussion last week, with regards the Ebola outbreak specifically, the UK is one of the leading supporters of the response led by the Government of DRC with support from the UN. The Secretary of State for International Development announced on 15 July at the WHO/OCHA High-Level Event on Ebola in Geneva that the UK would contribute up to a further £50 million to the response to December 2019.

A UN-brokered ceasefire could potentially contribute to ending the suffering of thousands of Congolese displaced and subjected to human rights violations associated with conflict in the east (as you so rightly highlighted in your intervention). However, recent evidence is mixed as to how successful temporary ceasefires are in terms of delivering humanitarian outcomes – and can sometimes offer armed groups the opportunity to regroup and even rearm.

In tackling Ebola, the priority must be addressing community trust and ownership, through socialising local communities on the seriousness of the situation and how they can help tackle the outbreak. Community trust and ownership in turn help prevent localised security incidents such as attacks on safe and dignified burial ceremonies. UK Aid is helping to support such activities. In the context of Ebola not being the primary concern of the local population, the feasibility and utility of a ceasefire unfortunately remains highly doubtful. Nevertheless, these issues are being taken extremely seriously by the UK and DFID, the FCO and other Government Departments will continue to explore all context-sensitive options to ending the outbreak.

Thank you once again for such a heartfelt intervention. You are right that this is a frightening situation, but I can assure you that the UK Government is doing all it can to end it.

I will place a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

BARONESS STEDMAN SCOTT OBE DL

The Lord Chidgey
House of Lords