

House Committee Reviews Multi-Agency Ebola Response

On October 24, 2014, experts and representatives from several U.S. departments and international organizations spoke at a U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Ebola response hearing. In their prepared statements to the Committee, the experts reviewed current measures taken to combat the Ebola epidemic, missteps and areas of mismanagement, and new protocols and procedures that are or will be implemented.

Panelists included The Honorable Nicole Lurie, M.D., Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS); The Honorable Michael Lumpkin, Assistant Secretary of Defense, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD); Major General James M. Lariviere, Deputy Director, Political-Military Affairs (Africa), DoD; The Honorable John Roth, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS); Deborah Burger, RN, Co-President, National Nurses United; and Mr. Rabih Torbay, Senior Vice President, International Operations, International Medical Corps.

When questioned about the U.S. military's role in West Africa, Lumpkin stated that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which is leading the efforts to contain Ebola, approached DoD for support because of DoD's experience with disaster response missions. Lumpkin also stated that DoD's involvement is an "interim solution" until international community can better mobilize to respond to the Ebola outbreak.

During questioning, Lariviere assured the committee that the U.S. military personnel would not be in contact with those infected with Ebola, and stressed that the U.S. military was taking every precaution to ensure the health and safety of America's service men and women.

Roth's statement included a review of an audit of DHS's pandemic preparedness supplies. The 2014 audit found that DHS had mismanaged its preparedness program, with Roth citing poor management and inadequate storage of pandemic supplies, as well as a lack of proper record keeping. DHS also did not conduct a needs assessment before purchasing pandemic supplies, leaving DHS unsure of whether its protective equipment stockpiles are adequate for responding to a pandemic.

Lurie spoke about the steps HHS and other agencies have taken since the outbreak in West Africa, and highlights the efforts underway to prepare an Ebola vaccine. According to Lurie, the U.S. is well situated to respond to the Ebola epidemic due to the collaborative efforts of HHS and their many interagency and public- and private-sector partners. Lurie also spoke about changes and lessons learned from previous health emergencies.

Burger and Torbay spoke of the needs of health care workers responding to the epidemic in the U.S. and West Africa, with Burger citing various concerns of nurses in U.S. hospitals and Torbay focusing on the responsibilities and hardships of health care workers treating Ebola patients in West Africa. **IAJ**