Forum: Economic and Social Council  
Issue: The Question of the Prevention and Control of Epidemics  
Student Officer: Ms. Arina Machine  
Position: Chair

Introduction

In general an epidemic occurs when an infectious disease spreads rapidly within a community or group of people. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines an epidemic as “the occurrence in a community or region of cases of an illness, specific health-related behavior, or other health-related events clearly in excess of normal expectancy. The community or region and the period in which the cases occur are specified precisely. The number of cases indicating the presence of an epidemic varies according to the agent, size, and type of population exposed, previous experience or lack of exposure to the disease, and time and place of occurrence.”

Generally disease epidemics are considered to be contagious diseases. However, the WHO recently defined the spread of obesity as a “global epidemic.” This would define that an epidemic is an infectious disease that does not need to be spread contagiously, but rather could be spread through lifestyle choices that are becoming increasingly popular in the developing world.

The spread of epidemics is a very real and prominent issue within both the developed and the developing world. The global obesity epidemic affects over 300 million people in developed nations, and over 115 million in developing nations. The number of people living with HIV has almost quadrupled since 1990. These diseases are some of the most pressing worldwide issues, but other epidemics such as cholera, yellow fever, and measles are continuously emerging in the developing world without warning, killing as many as 16 000 people with one outbreak.

Epidemics are a serious threat to the modern world due to their ability to cause serious damage without warning to governments and people. Developing nations are often hit the hardest by epidemics, as they are often transmitted through contaminated water supplies, sanitation facilities, food, and serious climate changes.

These epidemics make it difficult for a nation to develop both in a humanitarian, governmental, and economic manor.

These difficulties stem from the damage caused to social and economic infrastructures of a nation as a result of epidemics. With the addition of death and health related issues to the sufferers of the epidemics, they also often cause panic, both within the nation and unjustified panic-induced reactions by the international community. When the international community begins to panic as a result of epidemics, it often leads to the affected nation becoming isolated as a result of travel restrictions and import restrictions. These restrictions can cause incredible damage to an already fragile nation, as the sufferers of epidemics are often developing nations. These restrictions regarding the infected nation can cause serious economic damage, as it did during the cholera outbreak of Peru in 1991 when the nation lost 770 million dollars.1

Due to these devastating effects on humans and nations, it is a great concern of the United Nations to control the internal and international damages caused by epidemics.

**Background**

Epidemics have the potential to kill millions of citizens, spread around the world, and disrupt the very society that we live in. It is a government’s utmost responsibility to protect their citizens, but it is difficult to combat the effects of an infectious disease without a proper plan in place.

Infectious diseases have been a cause for concern throughout history, but recently, outbreaks such as the Zika virus and Ebola have raised global concern regarding the importance of a globalized initiative to prevent the spread of epidemics. Due to the increasing globalization of the world, caused by the fact that travel between nations has become faster and simpler than before, there is also increasing concern regarding the spread of epidemics through continents.

Statistically, epidemics have a huge impact on a society. Today, more than 34 million people around the world are living with the HIV virus, and since the first case was report over 25 million people have died from the virus. In 2009, the H1N1 flu may have killed as man as 575,000 people worldwide. Recently, there have been 1.5 million cases of ZIka in Brazil and Ebola had been thought to be spreading at a rapid rate2. Diseases such as these, and more, have been affected the world to catastrophic measures.

In the past, epidemics could be contained within areas due to a lack of travel, but that is no longer the case and concerns have been raised. Therefore, any epidemic in any part of the world can be considered a global issue that demands all nations to cooperate and take action to prevent further casualties.

In the current world, there is a possibility for containment, vaccinations, treatment, and even cures for a variety of epidemics. With the aid of vaccination

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smallpox has already been fully eradicated and others may soon follow in its path. Nowadays, it is utmost priority to find treatments and cures for epidemics such as HIV, and many nations are already circulating treatments for other disease epidemics.

Despite this opportunity for disease control, many nations do not have the financial or governmental stability to control epidemics within their borders. Many of these nations are the ones most heavily affected by diseases, which can kill large portions of their population and then travel to nearby nations.

It is because of all of this that it is of utmost importance to the international world that nations create and implement a plan as of how to deal with existing and future disease epidemics, as well as ensure that support is enabled to all nations facing epidemics to help control the spread of the disease, lower the number of causalities, and treat the disease.

**Key Events**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (title)</th>
<th>Countries affected</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913 (Great Flue Pandemic)(^1)</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>Disease epidemic that is estimated to have killed between 30 million to 50 million people worldwide</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950s (introduction of vaccines)(^2)</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>Vaccines had been introduced and used to prevent the spread of diseases such as smallpox, polio, measles, and tetanus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984–present (HIV)</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>Expected to have killed over 25 million people worldwide. Currently, a number of people are living with the virus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000 (Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network)(^3)</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network had begun in 2000, which aims to combat the international spread of outbreaks ensuring that appropriate technical assistance reaches affected states rapidly contribute to long-term epidemic preparedness and capacity building.</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome</td>
<td>China and Canada</td>
<td>Disease that has had over 8,000 cases and 774 deaths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>International Health Regulations</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>The International Health Regulations is an agreement between 196 nations, where all nations have agreed to build their capacities to detect, assess and report public health events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>H1N1</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
<td>Disease that may have killed as many as 575,000 people, though only 18,500 deaths were confirmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Measles</td>
<td>Worldwide, but especially Republic of the Congo</td>
<td>Highly contagious disease, and an estimated 122,000 people have died from measles worldwide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Ebola</td>
<td>West Africa</td>
<td>Large outbreak that has been expected to have caused thousands of deaths. Huge international hysteria caused due to fear of the virus spreading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Zika</td>
<td>Brazil and Latin America</td>
<td>Expected to have infected over 1.5 million people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key states/organization involved**

**States recently affected by damaging disease epidemics that have lasted to the present day or ended recently**

**Haiti (Cholera, 2010-present)**
Following the Haiti earthquake of 2010, the nation was faced with the ‘worst epidemic of cholera in recent history,’ according the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cholera is a disease that can kill within hours if left untreated. It is contracted through the ingestion of food or water infected with the bacterium Vbrio cholerae. There have been over 700,000 cases of infected people and over 9,700 casualties across Haiti and Central and South America.¹

Republic of the Congo (measles, 2011-present)
Measles are a highly contagious disease caused by the measles virus. It is one of the leading causes of death amongst young children and is contracted through direct contact with the virus in the air. The majority of causalities of measles are young children, however adults may also be affected. In the republic of Congo, the measles outbreak of 2011 is still present to this day and has killed over 100,000 people.¹

Nations of West Africa, mainly Mali, Nigeria, Guinea, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Gambia (Ebola, 2013-2016)
The Ebola virus is a severe, and often fatal, disease to humans that has been present since 1976. The 2014 outbreak of the virus is the largest and most complex Ebola virus outbreak in recorded history. It is transmitted through bodily fluids and has affected the nations of West Africa to a great extent, killing more people than all the past outbreaks of Ebola combined.¹

Brazil (Zika, 2015-present)
Zika is a virus that is transmitted mainly through mosquitos, and has been present in Brazil and nearby South American nations. Generally the disease is not fatal, but it has been linked to microcephaly and Guillain-Barré syndrome and other neurological complications. Within Brazil, an estimated over 1.5 million people have been infected with the Zika virus.¹

Relevant United Nations Organization:

**World Health Organization**
The WHO is a UN organization that aims to increase global health. They deal with all aspects of health, but also have initiatives related to epidemics. In general, the WHO deals with tracking and gathering statistics related to worldwide health as well as treated a variety of diseases.² The WHO is an organization that many times works within nations with emergency outbreaks of epidemics, helping to vaccinate, treat, and cure citizen. The WHO also works with the international community regarding the best approaches to deal with international epidemics, discussing which actions to take when an epidemic emerges. It has also created a variety of emergency response frameworks for both nations and itself to follow when a health emergency occurs.³

**World Bank**
The World Bank is an organization aimed at reducing and eradicating poverty. Often, the World Bank aims to support developing nations on their road to economic prosperity and as a result help their citizen live better poverty free lives. In regards to epidemics, the World Bank aims to help nations strengthen their health systems to the point when they can be self-sustained by the nation. This includes preparing nations’ health systems before and during epidemics. Currently, the World Bank is

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developing a Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF) to “enable a rapid response in the event of a disease outbreak before it becomes a pandemic.”

**UNICEF**
The United Nations Children’s Fund is a UN organization aimed at helping children. The UNICEF organization deals with anything that may give children the best start in life, including preventing poverty, war, violence, discrimination, and disease. The organization has been on the forefronts of epidemics such as cholera and HIV to ensure that families and their children are safe from the disease. UNICEF tries to ensure that all children, babies, and adolescence are able to have life-saving HIV prevention, treatment, care, and support. They work within and alongside governments to ensure the expansion of HIV education and support towards children and mothers with HIV.

**UNDP**
The United Nations Development Program works in almost 170 nations and territories, helping to achieve the eradication of poverty, and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion, helping countries to develop policies, leadership skills, partnering abilities, institutional capabilities and build resilience in order to sustain development results. The UNDP works with nations in epidemic disasters and helps governments to develop plans, implement healthcare centers, and give nations the ability to maintain peace and stability during and epidemic and overcome it through their own means.

**Red Cross**
The International Red Cross/Red Crescent is an independent, neutral organization ensuring humanitarian protection and assistance for victims of armed conflict and other situations of violence. The Red Cross works continuously to reduce disease and deaths and to improve health and human dignity in catastrophes, offering first aid quickly and long-term health programs. The Red Cross often fights diseases by offering healthcare, education, and necessary resources.

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# Relevant UN Resolutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution Title (UN Document Symbol)</th>
<th>Year adopted</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistance in cases of natural disaster (A/RES/2717(XXV))</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>The first resolution adopted by the UN general assembly dealing with the issue if epidemics. The resolution discusses the importance of international cooperation and planning regarding the control and prevention of epidemics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (A/RES/58/236)</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Resolution adopted specifically regarding the epidemic of HIV. Resolution states and discusses plans to prevent and control the spread of the virus, making mentions to developing nations, the effect of migration on the spread of disease, education, and other initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing capacity-building in global public health (A/RES/60/35)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>General resolution discussing the importance of public health in a globalized world. Creates and implements plans regarding long term medical funding, surveillance of outbreaks of diseases, and the use of organizations such as the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network of the World Health Organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Declaration of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (A/RES/66/2)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Resolution discussing non-communicable diseases and prevention of such diseases. Not all the diseases mentioned in the resolution regard epidemics, however the preventative measures can be applicable to epidemics in general. The resolution discusses the effect of diseases on development of a nation and how to combat the socio economic issues regarding control of epidemics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Previous Attempts to solve the issue

Creation or use of Non-Governmental Bodies to help with the control and prevention of epidemics

Through organizations such as the World Health Organization, Red Cross, The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network, and others, the United Nations is able to aid nations that are recently encountering Epidemics within their borders. These organizations generally have initiatives such as offering treatment, proper care of sick persons, and others. In a recent UNSC Resolution, these organizations were asked to not only aid through healthcare, but also offer food, water, shelter and other basic needs to these peoples as to ensure human rights for all. These organizations are non governmental and are able to aid developing countries that may not have the resources themselves to deal with their current epidemic crisis.

Using resources from around the world to aid infected nations

Most United Nations Resolutions on the topic discuss the need for a globalized effort to eradicate this disease. Ideally, this globalized effort would entail the search for a vaccine or cure, if there is not one already available. However, nations are also encouraged to aid healthcare to the nations. This aid usually entails, but is not limited to, sending medical personnel to teach advanced methods of care for patients, provide supplies such as medicine and necessary equipment, and others.

Possible Solutions

- Creation of an international plan as of how to act during an outbreak of an epidemic
- Increased surveillance and data collection regarding the rise in numbers of known infectious diseases, such as malaria, HIV, yellow fever, cholera, and others
- Creation of an international initiative to discover and commercialize treatments, vaccines, and cures, for existing and future disease epidemics
- Prevent the isolation of nations with current outbreaks of infectious disease, yet also contain and quarantine diseases
- International education campaigns regarding various diseases and how they are spread and contracted, specifically regarding diseases such as HIV which could be prevented with prior knowledge of safe measures
- Creating of new, temporary, hospitals in areas with epidemics to ensure proper care for all

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Watson, John. “Epidemics after Natural Disasters." NCBI,

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