15 July 2019 Joint News Release Geneva - Almost a year after the outbreak of Ebola was declared in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and with the number of new cases at worrying levels, the United Nations hosted a high-level meeting today in Geneva to take stock of the coordinated response and galvanize further support for the government-led effort to defeat the deadly disease.

Yesterday, 14 July, the first case of Ebola was confirmed in Goma, a city of about 1 million people south of the outbreak's epicenter. Almost 3,000 health workers have so far been vaccinated against the disease in Goma. More than 1,650 people have died in the current outbreak, while about 12 new cases are reported every day.

With the outbreak still confined to the provinces of North Kivu and Ituri, the response is at a critical juncture. WHO assesses the risk of spread to neighbouring provinces and countries as very high.

Chaired by the WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock, today's event included the DRC Minister of Health, Dr. Oly Ilunga, the Minister for Solidarity and Humanitarian Action, Mr. Bernard Biando Sango, and the Secretary of State for International Development of the United Kingdom, the Rt. Hon. Rory Stewart, as keynote speakers.

"The tenth outbreak of Ebola is a public health crisis taking place in an environment characterized by development challenges and deficiencies in the health system," said Dr. Ilunga.

"The Government acknowledges how difficult it has been to get ahead of this outbreak of Ebola in our country. The response is being carried out in a very complex environment, but with support from our friends in the international community, the Congolese are committed to bringing down the number of cases to zero," said Mr. Biando Sango.

"Together with the government, we can and will end this outbreak. We have better public health tools than ever to respond to Ebola, including an effective vaccine," said Dr. Tedros. "But we need to see an end to the attacks and other disruptions to the response." Since January, there have been 198 attacks against the health response that have resulted in 7 deaths and left 58 healthcare workers and patients injured. "We need political support from all parties, and community ownership, for the responders to do their work safely and without interruptions. This is the only way to stop the virus from continuing to spread."

Dr. Tedros also announced that he will reconvene the Emergency Committee as soon as possible to assess the latest development and advise him accordingly.

The areas of Ituri and North Kivu provinces affected by Ebola are characterised by poor infrastructure, political instability and ongoing conflict involving scores of armed militia groups and community mistrust of national authorities and outsiders.

In May, the UN Secretary-General and the inter-agency humanitarian system bolstered joint UN action. This included the appointment of a UN Ebola Emergency Response Coordinator (UN EERC), Mr. David Gressly, who is based in the affected areas to ensure an enabling environment for the public health response, including appropriate security, logistics, political and community engagement, and action to address the concerns of affected communities.

"Today, donors and responders expressed confidence in the approach we are now taking," said Mr. Lowcock. "Unless we get substantially more financial resources immediately, it will not be possible to end the outbreak. Every delay gives the virus an opportunity to spread, which has disastrous consequences. We need to do everything possible now to avoid reaching the

scale of the outbreak we saw in West Africa five years ago when more than 10,000 lives were lost before a multi-billion-dollar response brought the cases down to zero."

Speaking on the role of the international community, Rt. Hon. Rory Stewart, said: "We are on the edge with this crisis. My visit to eastern DRC this month only reinforced my view about just how urgent our response to this crisis must be. This is very, very real. We are essentially chasing Ebola – one of the world's most deadly diseases – around an area overrun by armed groups. We need the international community to step up and stop this outbreak from escalating. There is a real danger that, if we lose control of it, this disease could spread beyond DRC's borders to the wider region."

UN EERC Gressly, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, Dr. Ibrahima Socé Fall, and the president of the DRC Ebola Survivors' Association, Dr. Maurice Kakule joined the event from eastern DRC via video-conference. Ms. Annette Dixon, World Bank Group Vice President for Human Development, also participated via video-conference from Washington DC.

"We need to substantially improve our readiness and surveillance mechanisms so that we are getting ahead of the virus instead of chasing the virus. There is no room for complacency. It is not over until the transmission is broken in all affected areas," UN EERC Gressly said from Goma.

UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Dr. Omar Abdi spoke about community engagement, and the Secretary General of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Mr. Elhadj As Sy, spoke on preparedness in the DRC and in neighbouring countries. Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, also addressed preparedness. A representative from Medair, Dr. Trina Helderman, discussed the critical role that NGOs are playing in the response.