

September 25, 2014

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper  
Prime Minister of Canada  
Office of the Prime Minister  
80 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0A2

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

I write to you today on behalf of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) whose 628,000 members stand in solidarity with the people of West Africa and the front line health care workers who have been providing care for those affected by the Ebola virus (EBOV) at great risk to their own health. The 190,000 health care workers that CUPE represents in Canada know all too well the risks that their sisters and brothers are taking in trying to provide medical help during this outbreak in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, and Senegal.

We would have liked to support the work of public sector health care workers and public health departments, but the lack of such infrastructure in the hardest hit countries means that CUPE is making a donation of \$10,000 to the Public Services International Aid Fund and \$10,000 to Médecins Sans Frontières. We hope that our donation helps health care workers who are facing multiple challenges in this epidemic, including under resourcing, understaffing, lack of or shortages of protective equipment, heat-stroke from long hours in protective equipment, and 16 hour work days. The WHO reports that since the beginning of this crisis hundreds of health care workers have contracted the Ebola virus, with virtually half succumbing to the disease.

CUPE members have experience dealing with an emergency infectious disease epidemic. From February 23, 2003 to June 7, 2003, 387 people in Toronto were infected with SARS and 44 of them died. Nurse Nelia Laroza, a CUPE Local 79 member, contracted SARS while caring for patients at North York General Hospital and died. Nelia, like her sisters and brothers who attended to patients during the current Ebola epidemic in West Africa, continued to provide care to Torontonians despite knowing the health risks, and paid the ultimate price.

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Governments like ours have a global moral responsibility to make sure that the people of West Africa receive the best care and that health care workers are not called upon to pay the ultimate price needlessly. It is our responsibility as a leading power in the world to assist the people who are hardest hit with all means at our disposal. While we are proud that a publicly-owned laboratory in Winnipeg developed the experimental vaccine (VSV-EBOV) that your government has made available, we are also calling on you to stand ready to deploy the Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) and our other field hospitals.

CUPE members are concerned that the response of world leaders has been inadequate to deal with the scale and severity of this epidemic. When coupled with non-existent or patchwork public health capacities in West Africa, we have an emergency that should concern every country. We support calls from organizations such as Public Services International Aid Fund and the Consortium of Universities for Global Health for the urgent deployment of bio-disaster response teams from states with this capacity. It is time for the UN to convene a special debate on the global response to Ebola and to address the necessity for mitigation measures. Canada should take a leadership role and call for UN action now.

The Ebola epidemic highlights the global need for public medicare and for a robust public health infrastructure. In the long term, we would like to see Canada offer affected governments help in setting up effective public health departments that are focussed on prevention, education and, when the need arises, can take the lead in on the ground crises. Until such time, we call on your government to increase our financial contributions so that front line workers have access to the equipment they need to facilitate the service of additional medical personnel and to start the logistical planning necessary for the deployment of DART and our field hospitals, especially those that have teams of personnel trained to staff and operate isolation units.

CUPE is doing what it can. In addition to our donation, we are also encouraging our locals and our members to make their own contribution. But we are looking forward to your response to let us know how the government of Canada will step up to this crisis on behalf of Canadians.

Yours truly,



PAUL MOIST  
National President



CHARLES FLEURY  
National Secretary-Treasurer

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cc: T. Mulcair; H. Laverdière; J. Trudeau; K. Duncan