

## There can be only one response to viruses that recognise no borders: a borderless union of researchers, health authorities and drug companies

Today, half the world's population lives in cities, compared with 10% in 1900 and 30% in 1950. As Patrick Errard, Chairman of Leem, pointed out at a recent press briefing: *"This galloping urbanisation coincides with the ongoing issues of climate change, growth in world trade and the effects of pollution and deforestation, which are changing the relationship between humans and disease, as the emergence of the Ebola virus demonstrates: previously confined to relatively few areas, its propagation has proved deadly"*.

**Viruses recognise no borders.** And some of the particularly virulent examples, such as the Marburg, Machupo, Lassa and Crimean-Congo viruses, could well be the source of more epidemics in the future. There is only one response to these viruses with their ability to mutate and cross borders at will: a borderless union of researchers, health authorities, official agencies, international organisations, biotechnology companies, and pharmaceutical and vaccine manufacturers. *"The European Union is coordinating its efforts in terms both of humanitarian aid and unprecedented support for research through its R&D funding programmes. The industry is fully committed and is making a massive contribution to this collaborative effort, particularly through its flexible and rapid deployment of the Ebola+ programme as part of phase 2 of the Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI2). This programme is already financing 8 diagnostic and vaccination projects for the current epidemic. Another call for proposals will soon be launched to prepare for the process of countering the epidemics of tomorrow"*, explains Magda Chlebus, Director Science Policy at the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations (EFPIA).

But this is no time to lower our guard, because we must be constantly focused on improving our forecasting of tomorrow's epidemics. Gary Nabel, Chief Scientific Officer (CSO) and Ebola Response Coordinator at Sanofi, underlines this imperative: *"The world's leaders agree that 'giant steps' have been made since the first deadly consequences of the Ebola epidemic explosion in West Africa were seen last year. Nevertheless, we must be upfront and admit that we are still far from having won the war against this virus. We must find ways of accelerating the development of experimental vaccines to prevent and treat the infection caused by the Ebola virus. We hope to learn the lessons of this devastating epidemic, and therefore be able to respond to unpredictable threats of infectious disease epidemics in the future"*.

Given the many threats posed by infectious epidemics, drug companies are keeping up the pressure on researching and developing preventive and therapeutic solutions, spearheaded by vaccines. The fact that two vaccines are currently in phase III clinical trials in West Africa, and nine antivirals are under development demonstrates the strategic role of the vaccines and pharmaceutical industry in global health, and underlines its ability to focus its scientific and financial muscle on staying ahead of the viruses.

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