

Opening Remarks
by
His Excellency Oh Joon
President of the Economic and Social Council
“Briefing on the Zika Virus”
February 16, 2016 (3:00 - 5:00 p.m.)
ECOSOC Chamber

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome all of you to this briefing of the Economic and Social Council on the Zika virus.

On 1st of February, the World Health Organization has declared the recent cluster of microcephaly cases and other neurological disorders in some areas affected by Zika virus a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern”(PHEIC).

We know that Zika is a virus transmitted by the *Aedes* mosquito. It was first discovered in 1947 in the Zika forest of Uganda. Between January 2014 and February 2016, 34 countries reported transmission of Zika virus.

The health threat associated with the Zika Virus disease in Latin America and the Caribbean is very real.

The rise of microcephaly cases and other neurological disorders in the affected regions is extremely worrying.

This raises the question of preparedness of health systems and institutions to respond to the needs of infected women and men, children born with microcephaly, and their families, especially their mothers.

We must also consider its environmental dimensions. Possible considering factors, such as climate change and recent El Nino phenomenon, should be explored.

Distinguished Delegates,

Over the years, the Economic and Social Council convened special meetings to address global public health emergencies and promote a coordinated strategic response.

These included the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, avian flu in 2005 and Ebola in 2014.

We have learned from the past outbreaks that health emergencies have economic and social implications.

Governments can experience fiscal deficits due to increased expenditures on healthcare and social protection programmes.

Labour productivity can decrease if workers fall sick or need to care for sick family members.

Women, who are the most vulnerable, shoulder the caregiving for sick family members.

Travel advisories can negatively impact the business of tourism industries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Responding to the Zika virus requires a strong coordinated and integrated response from the international community, including the UN system.

This is why we have gathered here today.

This “international public health emergency” needs our utmost attention.

I would like to assure you and the international community that the Council will continue its efforts on tackling emerging global issues and mobilizing coordinated response from the UN System in timely manner.

Today, our distinguished speakers will brief us on the latest information on the Zika virus disease, and the health, economic, social and environmental dimensions of the spread of this virus.

We will hear how they are responding to the Zika virus.

They will also share their views on how the international community should respond to minimize the threat in affected countries and reduce the risk of further spread.

Thank you for your attention.

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