Ebola: Then and now

Name: David NABARRO
ROLE: Special Envoy on Ebola for the Secretary-General of the United Nations
DUTY STATIONS: UN HQ United States, Switzerland, and all affected areas

THEN

“When I started in this work, I was aware that we were in the middle of a disease outbreak of enormous proportions. The number of people getting sick was doubling every three weeks. Facilities were completely overloaded. Communities were in a state of despair and the leaders of the affected countries were wondering whether they had been forgotten by the world.

Airlines had stopped flying to the countries. Hospitals were closing because the health workers just weren’t able to be there. Ebola Treatment Units (ETUs) were full and indeed you were often in an ETU and seeing people arrive and being turned away because there was no place to be treated. Mortuaries were full, overflowing with bodies.

Sometimes those who were dying were left in the place they died for several days because the capacity to bury the dead was completely overloaded. There was a sense, not just of despair, but of abandonment.”

NOW

“Over the months, I watched how the world responded. Basically the world turned from disbelief to concern, to action, to total involvement. The Ebola outbreak became the business of so many people. Within months, we saw the numbers of cases starting to decline, mostly because people themselves took over their destiny and owned the response.

The problem is not yet completely sorted, but I see governments, international responders, United Nations, NGOs, very confident indeed now that that they are able to handle whatever they are sent and able to get on top of it quickly and well. I see this self-confidence and assurance, it is not just important for Ebola, but it is for the future of health security.

The world is going to be different as a result of this Ebola outbreak – much more confident, much more assured and much, much more capable to ensure the well-being of its citizens.”