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'Ebola vaccine would be around now if it came down to Western lives'

08/10/2014



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**RT:** *Is it hysteria or is Ebola a real threat to the Western world?*

**Ayo Johnson:** It all depends on who is looking at it. If you are looking from an African prospective – yes, it's a danger as far as they are concerned, too many people are catching the disease, the virus is out of control and many people are losing their lives. The question is can it be controlled, can it be contained. And weak infrastructure over time for many African countries has led to them to be unable to contain it, at least from a medical prospective, and of course they are asking the world for help.

**RT:** *Why are we seeing research for Ebola treatment and vaccines only now? It has been around since 1976.*

**AJ:** I think it's disappointing. It comes down to numbers, it comes down to the fact that it was very much contained in Africa, and for many people in the West, they thought that was a disease which was very much for Africans, and it has nothing to do with them. There was not a political appetite to get involved. Even if they did get involved, the financial muscle that was required for these scientists to do the experimental drugs that we required for vaccine – the pharmaceuticals were never going to be energized enough to get involved, they thought there was no profit in that. Now at least where we are, potentially looking at the global epidemic, guess what? The pharmacists, the scientists are the ones who are going to make all the money

because now we are looking at, even if we find a vaccine, it will be required worldwide.



Survivors of the Ebola outbreak attend a discharging ceremony at a health clinic in Freetown October 6, 2014. (Reuters/Umaru Fofana)

**RT:** *Do you think the drug companies are seeking for profit? Recently the Canadian government gave money for the research, and this is after the outbreak.*

**AJ:** The pharmaceuticals need to look at themselves, there is an ethical need. Clearly, the political will wasn't there. For the scientists right now who are getting involved in the science of finding a cure – it takes time. What we don't have at the moment is time. People are dying; the virus is spreading at an alarming rate. There is a risk that Western nations would find themselves with a potential epidemic for which they will not be able to control, something similar to what we see on the African continent, especially in West Africa. That said, the scientists and the pharmaceutical companies need to do far more and get involved far more, we need a political energy from the biggest nations in the world to drive some financial muscle into this.

**RT:** *Is there a market for a cure?*

**AJ:** Well, a market there is, definitely you are looking at the entire world requiring the vaccine to protect themselves should the virus go global, which is more than likely to ensue if we don't stop it right now. And even if we were to do so, we do not have the mechanisms to control it thereafter. I think a vaccine is required, the financial requirements are needed and the world is waiting and begging for the political gesture to be shown, and for this scientific will to be provided.

**RT:** *Do you think we would have had a vaccine if we had the Europeans or Americans infected*

*with Ebola ten years ago?*

**AJ:** Of course we would have had a vaccine a long time ago, if it comes down to Western lives. Whenever those are put at risk, somehow Western governments seem to take it much more seriously. It's tough luck for many Africans. We found ourselves with a virus which we couldn't control, for which it was our citizens who were dying, and sadly we didn't have the mechanisms or the political will or the financial muscle, or the technology with science to be able to find a cure for our own people. That's said, we were reliant on the Western nations as helpers for which it had to be a situation where their own citizens were put at risk for them to take it seriously.

The statements, views and opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of RT.

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