JUMUIYA YA AFRIKA MASHARIKI

East African Community

Standard Operating Procedure

How To Generate And Gain Approval For A Press Release

*Speaking with '**One Voice**' for a common goal*

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Responsible for the content	Participants of the “Workshop on the development of a standard operating procedure (SOP) for establishing a pool of rapidly deployable experts as part of a regional deployment mechanism” from 27-29 June 2018 in Arusha, Tanzania. TWG Communicable and Non-Communicable Diseases
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Table of contents

1.0 Background

The East African Community (EAC) Regional Contingency Plan for Epidemics Due to Communicable Diseases, Conditions and Other Events of Public Health Concern (2018 – 2023) (hereafter referred to as the Contingency Plan) was designed to strengthen governance in managing the risk and the response to infectious disease outbreaks. It is oriented towards different key international standards, such as the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA), which supports efforts between countries, international organizations, and public and private stakeholders, to promote global health security as an international priority. The development of the Contingency Plan was guided by the International Health Regulations (IHR) and related World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines, and the World Animal Health Organization's (OIE) instruments on veterinary Public Health and environmental frameworks, including the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in the area of infectious disease outbreaks and epidemics.

The analysis of the EVD epidemic clearly demonstrated the importance of rapid, clear and efficient risk and crisis communication, and of tailoring communication to impacted communities in ways that respected their cultural and social backgrounds.

Risk communication comprises the standardized, continuous and timely flow of relevant information to help people personally assess the risks they face and make informed decisions about how to protect themselves. Crisis communication kicks in when there is an emergency. It aims at delivering clear and easy-to-understand information designed to mitigate the impact of an outbreak or disaster.

Risk and crisis communication is based on trust and therefore needs to follow a 'One Voice' approach Risk and crisis communication exercised by the crisis management structure will be guided by the 'Risk and Crisis Communication Strategy for the EAC Region' and will be implemented according to standard operating procedures. The Contingency Plan crisis management structure shall establish capacity to conduct effective and efficient risk communication in 'peace time' and crisis communication in times of emergencies.

2.0 Purpose of the SOP

The purpose of the SOP is to describe processes and necessary steps for the development and approval of a press release associated with risk and emergency events, especially those of public health importance, in the EAC region.

2.1 Scope of the SOP

- List the necessary steps to develop a press release;
- Provide guidance on necessary content to include in a press release;
- Define a process for approval and dissemination; and
- Describe the expected outputs of a press release.

2.2 Target audience

This document is relevant for:

- Risk and Crisis Communicators (RCC) within EAC and Partner States
- External support personnel deployed to perform communications functions

3.0 General Principles

The objective of a press release is to:

- Provide timely and accurate information about a situation or event;
- Support media efforts to keep the public informed through communications that are factual, to the point, and easy to understand;

- Deliver information that helps people understand the risks they face and make informed decisions about how to protect themselves;
- Inform communities about EAC and Partner State's plans or efforts to address potential risks and/or hazards; and
- Build trust and support public confidence in EAC and Partner State's response efforts by highlighting operational endeavours and successes.

3.1 Communication Standards

Accuracy: Press releases shall be factual and accurate, unambiguous and easy to understand. Sources cited shall be trustworthy and reliable.

Timely: A press release and associated communications material shall be developed and delivered in a timely manner, when information is needed and relevant.

Clear: The press release shall be delivered in plain language, using short sentences and avoiding jargon and abbreviations

Open: Content of the press release shall be honest, open, and transparent. When information cannot be communicated (for security, approval, or other reasons), the reasons for non-disclosure shall be articulated. In an emergency situation the press release shall indicate when further information will be communicated.

Responsible: In the course of their duties, people performing the task of writing a press release may be privy to information that may not be appropriate to share. If there is any question about the sensitivity of information, leadership personnel, both at the EAC Secretariat and in the Partner States, must be consulted and must approve the release of the information in question (example: Public identification of the deceased should not take place prior to the notification of family.)

4.0 Procedures

4.1 Information Collection

Step 1: Review documents that support communications functions, including emergency guidelines, background materials, and handbooks.

Step 2: Prior to preparing the press release, collect information from the following sources:

- Existing key messages or FAQ documents associated with the emergency;
- Written messages received or sent within Partner States and EAC emergency command centres;
- Situation reports; surveillance and laboratory data;
- Verbal status updates from authorized response personnel and technical officers;
- Maps and status boards in command centres;
- Personal contact with emergency response staff members; and/or
- Telephone calls to/from other official agencies, and/or authorized spokespeople.

4.2 Development Tasks

Step 1: Identify target audiences for the press release (example: general public; people at high risk, etc.)

Step 2: Identify the top three priority messages, in order of importance, based upon knowledge gained through the **information collection** process.

Step 3: Compile information and create a DRAFT document using the press release template (Annex 1). (Note: the order of 'who, what, when, where, why, and how' in the template will change based upon the topic and context of the emergency event)

Step 4: Write an engaging headline that conveys the key messages and raises the interest of the media

Step 5: Include the top three priority messages in the first paragraph of the DRAFT press release, in order of importance.

Step 6: Obtain quotes and approval for quotes about the situation from leadership personnel, if possible, to include in the press release. (Note: This is not always possible, but it is an important service for the media, as they will be required to cite sources of information.)

Step 7: Provide contact information in the press release for a spokesperson authorized to officially respond to media questions. Ensure that the designated contact person is able and willing to respond promptly to media inquiries.

Step 8: Identify an expert to proofread the DRAFT technical content; confirm their availability and willingness to review.

Step 9: Identify a member of the team to proofread the DRAFT press release for content, accuracy, structure, grammar and typographical errors. Confirm their availability and willingness to review.

Step 10: Have an agreed-upon timeline and chain of command in place for clearance processes of press information (in an emergency situation the public should be informed within the first 24 hours and afterwards routinely in line with new developments)

Step 11: Solicit necessary approvals from leadership and technical clearance chain. There are likely to be multiple revisions and updates to DRAFT press releases.

Step 12: If the press release is to be issued by the EAC Secretariat and is reporting on events in a Partner State, refer to official public information sources or seek clearance from the relevant authorised officials within the Partner State.

Step 13: Incorporate revisions to the DRAFT press release as requested by leadership and technical staff, following the naming conventions referenced in the section Version Control and Naming Conventions in this SOP.

Step 14: Deliver the approved press release, marked FINAL, to communications spokespersons authorized to speak on behalf of Partner States and the EAC.

4.3 Version control and naming conventions

- Draft press releases must be created based upon approved procedures and templates.
- Draft press release names must include topic (disease or event) name, version identifier, date, and the word DRAFT. (Example: Ebola_v1_15July2018_DRAFT)
- Press release drafts that are superseded by new versions must be retained and clearly identified as superseded.
- Content revisions must be tracked and identified by authors' initials in each version. (Example: If Angelique Kidjo is working on the second DRAFT of an Ebola press release on 16 July 2018, her working document would be named 'Ebola_v2_16July2018_DRAFT_AK)
- Superseded documents must be removed from circulation and, when possible, be marked with the date and initials of the person updating the document status.
- Once review, revision, and authorization processes are complete, remove the word DRAFT and include the word FINAL in the name of the final, approved press release.
- Approved press releases must be retained in a non-editable format (such as PDF) and be accessible for use by Partner States as reference materials.
- Provide a date/time for release of publication to make sure that a press release is for example not published ahead of a press conference
- Have agreed-upon distribution processes in place including upfront information for relevant partners (example: Spokespeople of Partner State's ministries might need upfront information in order to prepare themselves for media requests.

4.4 Approval Process

Step 1: The zero draft must be shared with all relevant partners within the Secretariat to confirm and agree upon facts and figures included in the press release and associated policy implications

Step 2: The information contained in the press release must be confirmed with the relevant internal communications departments of all Partner States cited or mentioned in the press release.

Step 3: The final draft must be forwarded to the Corporate Communication and Public Affairs Department (CCPAD) for final approval and dissemination.

Step 4: Important: Partner States referenced in ANY press release must be provided with an advance copy of the press release and notified of its scheduled release date/time to allow them to prepare for media inquiries.

4.5 Press Release Follow-up

All media activity, including questions arising from the press release, shall be directed to communications spokespersons authorized to speak on behalf of Partner States and the EAC. Media requests for information shall be treated as a priority to accommodate reporters in meeting deadlines.

5.0 Monitor publications and online activity

Step 1: Conduct online searches or create an alert using Google alerts (or other media monitoring tools) to identify where and when stories referencing information from the press release are published.

Step 2: Maintain a media list and spreadsheet of media hits reported through the alert service or through your own independent online searches. Include the following information: Press release topic and internal name, publication, author, date of publication and/or online post, link to online story, and whether the story was accurate or not accurate.

Step 3: Make sure the reporter (and accurate contact information) of the story related to your press release is on your media list. If they are not on your list, take time to add them. There may also be informal communicators, such as influential social media personalities or bloggers, who share stories related to press releases. Include them in your media list and make an effort to gain their support and advocacy.

Step 4: If there is incorrect information, contact the reporter, source or outlet immediately to provide accurate information and request a correction.

Step 5: Enhance social media monitoring and engagement after the distribution of a press release to remain aware of public opinion and to watch for rumours and/or misinformation associated with topics addressed in the press release. Address incorrect information online and in print accordingly, using the SOP: "How to Manage Rumours."

Press Release Template (Annex 1)

Date	
Time	
Title	
Location	
Introduction	
Who	
What	
Where	
Why	
When	
How	
Implication?	
Quote	
Source	
Contact details	

Objectives and Metrics:

Objectives	**Measures**
Extend reach of critical messages through media outreach	• Amount of media coverage • Public awareness/feedback
Appropriate and well-coordinated communication between partners	
Timely provision of technical and logistical support through accurate communications	

	Approved by	Authorized by
Designation		
Name		
Signature		
Date		

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