

Annex II



EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Standard Operating Procedure How To Generate And Gain Approval For A Press Release



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

Standard Operating Procedure

How to generate and gain approval for a press release

Speaking with One Voice to mitigate Risks

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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) was designed to strengthen governance in managing the risk and the response to infectious disease outbreaks. It is oriented towards different key international tools, such as the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) which constitute efforts between countries, inter-national organizations, and public and private stakeholders, to accelerate progress towards a world which is safe and secure from infectious disease threats and to promote global health security as an international priority. Others are 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, like 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 involving all relevant disciplines, and of tailoring communication to the respective population with its specific cultural and social background.

Risk communication comprises the standardized, continuous and timely flow of information on hazards between all relevant stakeholders and via mediators to the public to build up knowledge and to enable them to take informed decisions in order to protect their health. Crisis communication kicks-in in the case of an emergency. It aims at clear and easy to understand information aiming at mitigating the impact of an outbreak and includes efforts to change beliefs and to avoid adverse behaviour.

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 CP 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 Partner States
- External support personnel deployed to perform communications functions

3.0 General Principles

The objective of a press release is to:

- Lead the process and provide sound information before biased or wrong information is spread due to the need of the media to provide information and the lack of facts.
- Keep the media and the public informed of risks and emergency situations at all times in easy to understand language;
- Enable the media to perform their task of providing the public with relevant and sound information;
- Enable citizens to take informed decisions to protect themselves from risks;
- Inform about EAC and Partner State's efforts underway or planned to resolve or mitigate the situation; and
- Build trust and support public confidence in EAC and Partner State's response efforts by highlighting operational endeavors 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 centers;
- Situation reports; surveillance and laboratory data;
- Verbal status updates from authorized response personnel and technical officers;
- Maps and status boards in command centers;
- 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; traders, 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: Provide a headline that conveys the key message and raises the interest of the media

Step 4: Include the top three priority messages in the first paragraph of the DRAFT press release, in order of importance.

Step 5: 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 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 makes a press release much more lively and interesting. It is also an important service for the media, as they need to cite someone)
- Step 7:** Name a contact person for further information
- Step 8:** Identify an expert to proofread the DRAFT content
- Step 9:** Identify a member of the team to proofread the DRAFT press release for content, accuracy, structure, grammar and typographical errors.
- 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 an event in a Partner State, refer to official public information sources or seek clearance from the relevant authorised officials.
- 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).

4.3 Approval Process

- Step 1:** The zero draft must be shared with all relevant partners within the Secretariat to confirm and agree upon facts, figures and policy implications included in the press release
- Step 2:** The information contained in the press release must be counter checked with the relevant internal communications departments of any Partner State cited or mentioned in the press release.
- Step 3:** The final draft must be forwarded to Corporate Communication and Public Affairs Department (CCPAD) for final approval and dissemination.
- Step 4:** Important: The Partner States cited in the press release must be provided with an advance copy of the press release and notification of its scheduled release 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.

Monitor publication

Have procedures in place to deal with intentional or unintentional mal interpretation of press release content, if relevant (example: Ask for clarification)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	Authorised by
Designation		
Name		
Signature		
Date		