

Statement by the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) at the

World Health Organization Executive Board, 152nd session, 2023

Agenda Item 12.1 Strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergencies

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed weaknesses in the global health security architecture and the need for a stronger, more equal and more inclusive health emergency preparedness, response, and resilience systems, worldwide.

We need to work hard at all levels to improve our preparedness for similar health crises in the future. IDLO welcomes the efforts of the WHO Director General under the auspices of the World Health Assembly to strengthen the global architecture to address public health emergencies.

Yet, adequate investment is equally needed to ensure that locally, all countries are ready to effectively implement their current commitments under the International Health Regulations, as well as any additional commitments under revised IHRs or a future instrument.

COVID-19 has demonstrated that many national health systems are fragile. Monitoring, coordination and surveillance mechanisms are insufficient. Legal and policy frameworks are inadequate. There are layers of structural inequality preventing equal access to affordable and quality health services without discrimination.

The rule of law is a key enabler to ensure that effective systems for preventing, managing, and responding to public health emergencies are in place and well-functioning at the country level to support timely and effective action, consistent with human rights norms and standards. It is especially important to prepare countries to align their health systems and structures to the revised global architecture and ensure a coordinated global response to public health emergencies.

As the only global, intergovernmental organization exclusively devoted to promoting the rule of law to advance peace and sustainable development, IDLO supports low- and middle-income countries to strengthen their legal frameworks to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and other public health emergencies, based on human rights and within a One Health framework. In coordination with WHO, IDLO recently supported the Governments of Uganda and Zambia to review their policy and legal frameworks in accordance with the International Health Regulations, as well as human rights and other relevant international obligations. We have learned that there is a critical need to strengthen local capacity, including civil society capacity, to understand the role of the law and legal preparedness in the prevention of and response to public health emergencies.

IDLO reaffirms its commitment to assist countries in building stronger, more resilient, equitable and inclusive public health systems through rule-of-law based responses as a core contribution to a safer and more just world for all. In so doing, we appreciate the fruitful and longstanding partnership with WHO and we stand ready to collaborate with partners to leverage health law interventions as a key tool to advance health outcomes and help States prepare for health emergencies.