

Pandemic Preparedness and Response & The International Health Regulations

Belize, Committee A, Items 14.1, 14.2, 15.1 and 15.2

May 23, 2023

Belize thanks the Director-General for the reports on Items 14.1, 14.2, 15.1 and 15.2. The COVID-19 experience holds us responsible to acknowledge the global emerging and reemerging diseases. These threats do not discriminate nations nor people. We now have been placed at a new starting point whereby we have the opportunity to rebuild our surveillance systems.

I must acknowledge that the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization has accompanied us step by step as we traversed this mortal experience. The impact of this pandemic will live with us for the next decades. As of now, we need to retake the path of preparedness along with our Partners (PAHO/WHO, CDC). An immediate challenge we need to address is to reinforce the sustainability of our efforts in the areas of laboratory services, information systems, diagnostic imaging, and people-centered health care.

The Ministry of Health and Wellness in Belize is committed to join hands with national and UN entities who have a role in the responsibility of creating a level of country preparedness in order to ensure a timely and effective response for future pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the gaps in our health systems. It is our sacred duty as leaders in health to be on the vanguard, using the lessons learned from this recent pandemic, and strengthen and support all entities who are on the forefront of administrative and technical services.

Belize also notes the challenges being faced regarding the implementation of the core capacities of the IHR and the coordinated approach for the management of acute public health emergencies. While many strides have been made, we still face challenges in laboratory capacity and surveillance, health emergency management, and infection prevention and control. Furthermore, there is also great need for strengthening the areas of policy, legal and regulatory frameworks, norms and standards, human resource capacity, risk communication, and surveillance systems.

To address some of these areas, Belize's recent accomplishment in further strengthening and making more functional the One-Health Approach makes the country better prepared to detect, prevent, control and respond to health emergencies. The inauguration of the virtual Platform (<https://onehealth.gov.bz/>)

in November 2022 to facilitate information sharing for better decision making, places the country at the cutting edge of innovation and high-level adaptation during an era when information sharing is one of the most important elements during the response to any health event. Through the One Health Initiative, the Government of Belize is making significant progress in its endeavor of promoting, improving, and defending the health and well-being of all species by enhancing cooperation and collaboration between relevant stakeholders in the Human-Animal-Environment interface. Furthermore, the intersectoral collaboration will foster leadership and management to achieve these goals. It will also improve the response to future pandemics and outbreaks.

As we seek to improve our capacities for pandemic preparedness and response, Belize could benefit from technical cooperation to strengthen its IHR core capacities and the establishment of a national inter-agency committee to monitor and facilitate the strengthened implementation of the IHR. Going forward, as we aim to be better prepared to detect, prevent, control and respond to future health emergencies, we must enhance cooperation and collaboration to continue to work together to have the necessary resources and capacities for the proper implementation of the International Health Regulations. Belize remains committed in working towards this.

I thank you!