



**World Health
Organization**

SEVENTY-THIRD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY
Agenda item 13.2

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Progress report from the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response

The Director-General has the honour to transmit to the Seventy-third World Health Assembly a progress report submitted by the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (see Annex).

ANNEX

THE INDEPENDENT PANEL FOR PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Progress report to the Seventy-third World Health Assembly

FOREWORD

The Member States and all the stakeholders attending this World Health Assembly need no reminder that the COVID-19 pandemic is continuing to rage around the world. When the Director-General spoke at the opening of the Assembly on 18 May, he conveyed the gravity of the 4.5 million cases reported to WHO. The number now is more than ten times that, and the confirmed count of deaths is well over a million. These numbers speak to a far wider catastrophe of families left bereft; health facilities stretched beyond breaking point; jobs, livelihoods and businesses lost; and economies desperately seeking to adjust to new realities of the pandemic.

Most catastrophes for most people are far-off events, but this pandemic has touched us all. At the first meeting of the Independent Panel, panelists related their personal experiences of the pandemic including the loss of close family members – an experience shared by millions across the globe. It has deepened our resolve to carry out a root and branch review to uncover what could and should have been done better to avert this pandemic, and to propose a plan for all necessary steps to ensure that the world is better prepared in future.

We are very mindful of the words of the resolution passed by the WHA in 19 May, and its desire for an “impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation” to “review experience gained and lessons learned” and thus to “make recommendations to improve capacity for global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response”. We will rely on not only Member States but also stakeholders from every level of government, those beyond government, the private sector, scientists, activists and citizens the world over both to inform our investigation, and to commit to action without delay to improve pandemic response and stave off future pandemics more effectively.

This Progress Report sets out the efforts of the Independent Panel thus far, the key questions on which we intend to focus, and the methods and principles which will guide our work. Above all, we wish to be inclusive in the information, ideas and analysis which we consider. As we take into account the myriad details of what has happened and proposals for change, we are aware that no country has found the perfect response and that no solution is a magic bullet. In facing this devastating pandemic, we need humility and determination in equal measure.

**H E Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
Rt Hon Helen Clark**

PROGRESS REPORT

1. The Independent Panel was established by the WHO Director-General pursuant to Health Assembly resolution WHA73.1 (2020). In July 2020 the Director-General requested the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Right Honourable Helen Clark, and the former President of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, to be Co-Chairs of the Panel. The Co-Chairs were mandated by the Director-General to select independently Panel members. Based on a long-list of names suggested by Member States, together with other names put forward, they selected 11 panelists: Mauricio Cárdenas, Aya Chebbi, Mark Dybul, Michel Kazatchkine, Joanne Liu, Precious Matsoso, David Miliband, Thoraya Obaid, Preeti Sudan, Ernesto Zedillo and Zhong Nanshan. Details of the Panel members are given at the Panel's website <https://theindependentpanel.org/panel-members/>.
2. As reported to the Executive Board at its special session on the COVID-19 response, held on 21 September 2020,¹ the Panel has initiated work on conducting an impartial, independent, and comprehensive review of experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to coronavirus disease (COVID-19). It is working in a manner that is as open and transparent as possible, seeking out the world's best expertise, and listening to the perspectives of different stakeholders. The Independent Panel collaborates with, and benefits from, the work of other bodies such as the IHR Review Committee and the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee.
3. The first meeting of the Panel was held on 17 September 2020 and the second meeting on 20 and 21 October 2020. Panel meetings are convened virtually and reports of the Panel meetings are made public on the Panel's website.
4. The first meeting of the Panel received the terms of reference and discussed a proposed programme of work. The Panel agreed to focus on an analysis and vision for a strengthened international system for pandemic preparedness and response, a review of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lessons to be learnt from previous pandemics and from the global spread and devastating impact of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).
5. The second meeting of the Panel focused on four areas of work: (1) development of an authoritative chronology of how the pandemic unfolded; (2) methods to understand in detail the responses to the pandemic in a selection of countries representing a broad range of response contexts; (3) development of an international system ideally placed to deliver effective pandemic preparedness and response; and (4) consideration of the state of WHO and its response to COVID-19, including perspectives from country, regional and global levels and from actors inside and outside WHO.
6. The Panel agreed that the work on establishing an authoritative chronology of emerging information and actions taken in response is of great importance and is central to the Panel's mission. The Panel agreed that close attention needs to be paid to the period immediately leading up to and closely following the first advice concerning the new virus. It was agreed that the Panel will need to collect information rigorously, and that the outcomes of this work should be made clearly accessible to the global public given the level of interest in the issue around the world. The meeting agreed to capture the widest possible range of information and expertise. A relationship will be established with the tripartite FAO/OIE/WHO collaboration and its work on the origins of SARS-CoV-2, which includes a proposed mission to China.

¹ Document EBSS/5/3.

7. The Panel discussed ways to capture the different experiences of countries in responding to the pandemic, underlining the importance of ensuring that countries were selected from across all regions and represented responses that were apparently more effective, those that were apparently more challenged and those that may fall between these two poles. It was noted that one element in the analysis should be the extent to which countries followed their own blueprints for pandemic response. It was agreed that analysis was needed to capture the reasons why responses happened in different ways in different countries, as well as what impact challenges such as difficulties in securing access to supplies, diagnostics and therapeutics may have played.

8. It was therefore agreed that the vision of the international system needs be organized around the questions of what the functions of the system are, what is meant by the system, how it is financed, and the interaction of the system with the real world – including the nexus between pandemic response and impact. The Panel agreed that it was important to include actors beyond the national state in a plurilateral view of responsibility and accountability which includes civil society and the private sector, and that attention should be paid to the issue of reinforcing the nature of pandemic preparedness as a global public good. It was concluded that the Panel should be bold and “think big”, while ensuring that its recommendations have both relevance and impact.

9. Overarching institutional questions were discussed such as whether WHO has the right mandate for pandemic preparedness and response and the Director-General the relevant authority, whether the Organization has the right structure and capacity to deliver on its mandate, and whether the financing of the Organization is optimal. The Panel agreed that its consideration of WHO needs to address both what WHO should do, and what it should not do. The question of whether WHO is empowered to achieve its mandate is central. As well as examining WHO’s institutional functionality, the Panel suggested that it would also be important to look at governance issues. The Panel agreed that the functioning of WHO should be considered from a range of perspectives, including those of countries and of external actors. There was agreement that the consideration of WHO should range across the whole of its mandate and not just across the health emergencies programme.

10. The Independent Panel is undertaking its work guided by the highest standards of impartiality and objectivity. The Panel will draw on a wide network of scientific experts from all regions in undertaking its analysis. Issue-specific expert roundtables will be convened to address relevant areas of focus within the work programme, and a register of experts is being compiled. Systematic reviews of published scientific literature and relevant policy and implementation reports are being conducted to consider particular aspects of the COVID-19 response. Engagement and outreach efforts will be conducted with a range of target groups to ensure the representation of a wide range of opinion, including from groups that are digitally disconnected.

11. The Panel intends its review and analysis to result in timely and implementable recommendations. It will therefore pay close attention, as it develops each recommendation, to clear indications as to who should be responsible for taking the recommendation forward, its likely costs in terms of both financial and human resources, and the expected timescale for implementation.

12. In recognizing the impact of the pandemic in exacerbating disadvantage and its disproportionate impact on vulnerable and marginalized communities, the Panel will ensure that equity is considered in all aspects of its analysis, review and recommendations. It will seek out leading examples of preparedness and response efforts which mitigate the pandemic’s unequal outcomes.

13. In order to ensure the confidence of stakeholders in the work of the Panel, information will be provided to the Panel on a confidential basis. However, where such confidentiality considerations do

not apply, the Panel will seek to be as transparent as possible, providing regular public updates on its work through its website. The website provides a vehicle for submissions and feedback to the Panel. As well, the Panel will convene webinars and other interactive opportunities for interested stakeholders, including members of the public, to participate in its work.

14. The Panel is being assisted by a secretariat in fulfilling its mandate and terms of reference.

15. Through the Co-Chairs and the Panel Secretariat, the Independent Panel is maintaining regular communication with Member States, both individually and on a regional basis, to keep them apprised of the work of the Panel and to seek their inputs and suggestions. The Panel has appreciated the suggestions made and strong support of not only Member States but also a wide range of stakeholders from all parts of the world.

16. The Independent Panel will provide an interim report to the Executive Board at its 148th session, scheduled for 18–26 January 2021. The report will update Member States on the progress of the Panel’s work and critical issues arising therefrom. Should it be deemed necessary, and should the Panel bring to light significant gaps in global responses, the Panel will not hesitate to call for urgent corrective action.

17. The Panel has been requested to provide a report in advance of the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly scheduled for May 2021.

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