

European Union

Statement

WHO

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WHA74 Item 17.1: COVID-19 Response

Geneva, 25 May 2021

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Draft EU Statement

Chair,
Director General,
Excellencies,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries the Republic of North Macedonia*, Montenegro* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

We thank WHO for the report and epidemiological update.

Despite commendable efforts by WHO, member states and civil society, the pandemic situation remains dire and alarming in many parts of the world. COVID-19's grave health and socio-economic consequences threaten to imperil or reverse the attainment of the SDGs.

Last year's resolution 73.1, adopted by consensus, has guided the global response.

* The Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The most tangible success was recognizing immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good and the setting up of the ACT-Accelerator and COVAX to achieve that goal.

As global vaccine shortages persist, the EU continues to be the largest exporter of COVID-19 vaccines to the world and will continue its efforts to increase global vaccine production capacities in order to meet global needs. The first vaccines distributed through COVAX were mRNA vaccines produced in the EU. EU countries were the first to donate vaccines through COVAX. EU companies are also actively increasing local production through partnerships around the world. All these are actions the Independent Panel urgently recommends.

To fulfill its mission, ACT-A depends on stronger political and financial support, more countries sharing doses, technology transfer and increasing global vaccine production. We therefore welcome the establishment of the COVAX Manufacturing Taskforce and the participation of WTO and the MPP. We support the Independent Panel's recommendation of an evaluation of ACT-A to feed into the platform's mandate.

Second, this pandemic has demonstrated the relevance of the interlinkage of human, animal, environmental and planetary health. We welcome initiatives to strengthen the One Health approach and to leverage data, new technologies and cooperation in research and development, such as the Bio Hub, the One Health High-Level Expert Panel, the Global Pandemic Radar and the WHO Hub for Epidemic and Pandemic Intelligence. To anticipate and prevent the next pandemic, One Health must be implemented across the whole of government

and of society. To reduce risks of zoonotic outbreaks and to protect our livelihoods, we need closer collaboration of governments, WHO, FAO, OIE and UNEP, including to tackle increasing land-use change for agriculture and the extraction of natural resources, and to mitigate risks resulting from global travel and transport, as well as to set stricter safety and hygiene standards of markets.

Third, we call for progress on the WHO study on the origins of SARS-CoV-2. Only a thorough review of the origins of the virus and its transmission into the human population will help us fully understand and control this pandemic, and prevent and prepare for future ones. We request WHO to continue the studies on all four hypotheses, present a clear timeline for the follow-up work and regularly brief member states on plans and progress.

Looking ahead, it seems clear that business as usual will likely lead to the next pandemic.

We need to strengthen WHO and review international health structures on pandemic preparedness. We therefore support a process towards an international pandemic treaty to complement the IHR and to strengthen national, regional and global capacities as well as resilience to future pandemics. Finally, there should be no white spots on the map, the whole world should benefit from WHO's guidance and be able to contribute to our joint knowledge and efforts.