European Union

Statement

WHO

74th World Health Assembly
(24 May-1 June 2021)

WHA74- Item 17.2 & 17.4: Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)

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.

The EU thanks the IHR-Review Committee, the IOAC and the IPPPR for their reports, as well as the DG for its report on the implementation of the IHR.

The reports confirm one plain and simple truth: Member States and the international system were not prepared for a pandemic of this nature and magnitude. Member States, and that includes us in the EU, need to make sure the IHR are fully implemented, and held accountable. We fully support the recommendation of the IHR-Review Committee to reinforce the mandate and authority of the National Focal Points and to develop universal periodic peer reviews. We also want to stress the importance of enhanced laboratory capacities

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

for surveillance and sequencing. The Covid-19 pandemic also urges us to review our approach to preparedness. Indicators used to assess preparedness need to take into account, among other things, two key factors: the adaptability of health systems, and the ability to address the socio-economic challenges.

The reports call for greater cooperation from Member States on notification and sharing of information. We want to echo the IPPPR recommendation that WHO should be given the explicit authority to publish information about outbreaks with pandemic potential on an immediate basis, without requiring the prior approval of national governments, and to investigate pathogens with pandemic potential in all countries with short-notice access to relevant sites. On the idea of an intermediate level of alert, we note the potentially diverging views and hence look forward to further discussion on this issue.

The Covid-19 pandemic also urges us to review our approach to precautionary measures. As pointed out by the IPPPR, one should assume that an emerging respiratory pathogen is transmissible human to human until proven otherwise. As pointed-out by the IOAC, precautionary principle in the implementation of travel-related measures could allow for rapid action against an emerging pathogen with pandemic potential. We urge the WHO Secretariat to facilitate discussions among experts on those issues and to report to Member States.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic shows us that while the IHR provides for preparedness and alert, they are not enough for the national or global response. The IHR do not provide measures for rapid and equitable delivery of life-saving health technologies. This is why we are committed to work towards an international treaty on pandemics that would complement the IHR.

To the chairs and co-chairs of the review panels. We hear loud and clear your message on the urgency to act now. We want to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Under the next item, a resolution on WHO strengthening will be proposed for adoption by the WHA. This resolution is a first important step in our collective endeavor to draw all the lessons from the pandemic and to improve our systems and tools for prevention, preparedness and response, and in short, to build back better. It sets up a Member States working group that will consider each and every recommendation you made. We asked you to challenge us when you started your work. Please allow us now to challenge you on the recommendations you made. Thank you in advance for the opportunity.