The Fight Over the Next Pandemic

0:00

from The New York Times I'm Michael

0:02

abaro this is the

0:05

[Music]

0:10

daily today at the height of the covid

0:14

pandemic nearly 2 countries started

0:17

negotiating a plan to ensure they did

0:20

better when the next pandemic inevitably

0:23

arrives their deadline for that plan was

0:26

last week

0:30

my colleague Aura mavil explains why so

0:34

far those negotiations have

0:37

[Music]

0:46

failed it's Thursday June

0:50

[Music]

0:53

6th so appr something that was supposed

0:56

to happen and happen right now that I

0:59

think most of didn't even know was ever

1:01

in the works hasn't happened and that's

1:04

a global plan for the next pandemic so

1:07

tell us this entire story think back to

1:12

2021 the very worst days of Co when we

1:16

had thousands of people dying in the US

1:18

and in the rest of the world there was

1:20

just so much confusion about whether to

1:22

wear masks or not whether to close

1:25

schools and it was very difficult to

1:28

think what any country should do

1:31

right and so in the middle of that chaos

1:35

and confusion the eagle has landed

1:37

carrying the hopes of a country the

1:39

first shipment of Corona virus vaccines

1:42

reach Australian Skies we did get the

1:44

vaccines you're watching right now

1:46

history being made one of the first

1:48

people in the entire country right here

1:50

to get dose number two of the fizer

1:52

vaccine and all of a sudden there was

1:54

this hope but the thing is that those

1:56

vaccines were really mostly available in

1:59

the Richer count R parts of Asia and

2:01

Latin America have recorded a spike in

2:03

Co fatalities amid medical supply and

2:06

vaccine shortages few people in Africa

2:09

have been vaccinated some countries

2:11

don't have any vaccines at all so we in

2:14

the United States and a lot of countries

2:16

in the European Union and some of the

2:17

other high and middle- inome countries

2:20

had the vaccines rich countries have

2:22

enough doses to vaccinate everyone

2:24

nearly three times over whilst poor

2:26

countries don't have enough to even

2:28

reach health workers and people at risk

2:30

but elsewhere in the world there were no

2:33

vaccines

2:35

really it became obvious to some low and

2:39

middle- inome countries that they were

2:40

not going to do very well in this

2:42

pandemic there were all these Advanced

2:44

purchase orders from the Richer

2:45

countries and they were having some very

2:47

tough negotiations with Pharma companies

2:50

that were you know charging them more

2:52

than they were charging the rich

2:55

countries and by the end of that

2:57

horrible horrible year more than 90% of

3:01

people in the Richer countries had had

3:03

two doses of vaccine but 2% of people in

3:08

low-income countries had had any

3:10

vaccines so that really just striking

3:14

inequity made people realize this was

3:18

just a mess we did not know how to deal

3:20

with a

3:21

[Music]

3:24

[Applause]

3:25

[Music]

3:27

pandemic the time to act is now so in

3:31

December

3:32

2021 by the end of this year of inequity

3:36

we must not allow the memories of this

3:38

crisis to fade and go back to business

3:42

as usual the World Health Organization

3:44

brought together all the countries the

3:46

impacts on our societies economies and

3:49

health especially for the poor and the

3:52

most vulnerable are too significant and

3:56

launch this process to come up with a

3:59

Playbook to really think about how all

4:02

the countries of the world need to

4:03

prevent and respond to the next pandemic

4:06

and do it in a way that would protect

4:08

everybody rich and poor across the world

4:11

and the who decided that this discussion

4:14

could not be just an informal

4:17

conversation between Health ministers

4:18

that this needed to be an international

4:21

treaty a legally binding treaty so that

4:24

every country has to take this very

4:27

seriously and everybody agrees on how to

4:30

do this next time H so at the very

4:33

height of CO's awfulness these countries

4:35

in the who are saying we know you all

4:38

are very very busy fighting this

4:40

pandemic it is taking up all your time

4:42

and energy but we need you to now start

4:45

to think about how badly this is going

4:48

and not just fight the current pandemic

4:49

but start planning on a better way to

4:51

fight the next one that's kind of a big

4:53

ask it is a big ask but what is the

4:56

alternative that we come to the next

4:57

pandemic and have a repeat of all of the

5:00

chaos and confusion we saw during covid

5:03

so I think it was a an acknowledgement

5:05

that we needed it we needed to come up

5:07

with a plan and it became obvious that

5:10

part of that plan needed to be a way to

5:12

repair the mistrust that had formed

5:14

between low income countries and high

5:16

inome countries and that without

5:19

repairing that we just did not really

5:20

stand a good chance of fighting the next

5:22

pandemic right and of course the thing

5:24

about a global pandemic is that any weak

5:27

link any country that's not doing its

5:29

part or getting what it needs becomes a

5:31

problem for every other country that's

5:33

the nature of a pandemic we need we

5:35

talked about this with you we talked

5:37

about this with our colleagues

5:37

throughout the pandemic a system where

5:40

there's a strong program and plan in

5:43

every country so that the virus can be

5:46

Stamped Out exactly I mean in the United

5:48

States more people died because of

5:51

variants than they did because of the

5:52

original virus and a lot of those

5:54

variants started in countries that did

5:57

not have access to vaccines Okay so so

5:59

what do these talks start to actually

6:03

look like and just how many countries

6:05

end up being involved in them so all of

6:07

the countries that are member states of

6:09

the World Health Organization were

6:11

involved in this it's 194 countries wow

6:14

and they all sent delegates to meet to

6:17

draft something and then to discuss

6:19

every aspect of it and try to come to a

6:21

consensus and the goal was to get that

6:24

to a point where all the countries were

6:26

ready to sign off on it by May 2024

6:30

they had meetings over a period of 2 and

6:32

a half years to talk through this some

6:35

sections they all agreed on pretty

6:37

easily you know you can imagine like the

6:39

general goals like yes we should have a

6:42

good plan to fight a pandemic or yes we

6:45

should have good research on vaccines

6:47

and drugs things like that the general

6:49

sort of philosophical goals everybody

6:51

agrees on right principles are always

6:53

the easiest thing to negotiate easiest

6:55

thing to negotiate but then you start

6:56

getting into how this happens right and

7:00

it's actually kind of interesting in the

7:01

draft if you look at the drafts they

7:03

have areas that are green which means

7:05

everybody sort of agreed and yellow

7:07

which means they're starting to come to

7:09

an agreement there's sort of General

7:10

consensus and then white which means

7:12

it's like really no agreement they're

7:14

just not even on the same page and when

7:18

you look at like what's green across all

7:20

of these drafts the philosophical goals

7:23

Green from the start no problem the

7:25

yellow started to come slowly these

7:27

these areas of consensus things like for

7:29

for example safety measures in the labs

7:31

that work with dangerous viruses and

7:33

that's not just because one of the

7:35

theories about covid is that the virus

7:36

leaked from a lab we know from long

7:38

before covid that lab safety is very

7:41

important for making sure that those

7:43

dangerous viruses don't get out into the

7:45

world there's also agreement around how

7:48

countries should do surveillance to see

7:52

what outbreaks might be emerging and

7:54

some of that stuff is tricky like why

7:56

why why is it tricky I mean isn't there

7:57

a pretty standard Playbook for trying to

8:01

detect a virus and what to do once you

8:03

detect it sure but there are some things

8:05

that are big sticking points like money

8:08

not all countries have the resources to

8:10

do the kind of surveillance that they

8:11

need to do and so who funds that and

8:14

then you know some countries have vested

8:16

interests like Argentina wouldn't want

8:18

any rules that forbid sort of export of

8:22

certain kinds of meat products because

8:23

that's a big part of their economy there

8:25

are countries where live animal markets

8:27

are a thing and not just in China which

8:29

we're all familiar with is another

8:31

origin theory for covid lots of other

8:33

countries rely on these markets and they

8:36

don't want to have very strict rules

8:38

about which animals can be held together

8:40

and how densely packed they can or can't

8:42

be so when you start to get into the

8:44

details there it is actually difficult

8:46

to reach consensus on some of these

8:48

things but they have made a lot of

8:51

progress and they have come to yellow

8:53

and green on some important things like

8:56

that every country should have you know

8:58

a healthcare work Force trained to

9:01

respond to a pandemic that they should

9:03

make best efforts to have local

9:06

production of things like vaccines and

9:08

drugs and that they should provide all

9:11

of these resources to their own citizens

9:13

things like that those are all you know

9:15

under agreement they're all green now so

9:18

what exactly is holding these

9:20

negotiations back what ends up being the

9:22

biggest remaining conflict it won't

9:25

surprise you to hear Michael that the

9:27

biggest conflict is exactly what all of

9:30

this began with which is the lack of

9:32

access that low-income countries have to

9:34

things like

9:36

[Music]

9:38

vaccines there have been interesting

9:41

proposals in the drafts and one in

9:42

particular that would solve at least

9:44

some of this issue but it's been very

9:47

difficult to convince rich countries

9:49

middle- inome countries and low-income

9:51

countries that that proposal would be of

9:55

great benefit to everybody involved

9:59

[Music]

10:09

we'll be right

10:11

back so AA tell us about this particular

10:15

proposal that could do a lot of work to

10:19

solve the inequities at the center of

10:22

these negotiations and why that proposal

10:25

has created so much conflict the heart

10:27

of the section that has really created

10:30

the most conflict is whether low-income

10:33

countries get access to vaccines in a

10:35

timely manner and at a cost that is

10:37

Affordable to them and all the

10:39

low-income countries you know recognize

10:41

that they don't have a lot of bargaining

10:42

power they were treated pretty poorly by

10:44

Pharma companies during this past

10:47

pandemic and so they've been thinking

10:49

about setting things up so that that

10:52

does not happen again that the next time

10:54

around they are not left behind right

10:56

but like you said they don't have a lot

10:58

of power to bargain they don't but you

11:00

know there have been times when poor

11:02

countries have come up with a way to

11:04

make everybody else realize that they're

11:07

essential to this whole process so let

11:09

me give you an example of this that

11:11

really I think illustrates how much

11:14

everybody else needs the low income

11:16

Nations during an outbreak so in

11:19

2006 Indonesia was battling a bird flu

11:24

outbreak and they had been very

11:27

dutifully sending samples of the virus

11:29

that they had in their country to the

11:32

World Health Organization labs to

11:34

analyze and you know that information

11:36

helps Pharma companies develop things

11:38

like vaccines or tests right or tests

11:41

and in this particular case the

11:42

Indonesian Health Ministry approached

11:45

the World Health Organization to say

11:46

look we've given you these samples we

11:49

have people dying in our country and we

11:52

need access to vaccines and drugs and

11:55

the who told them sorry we don't

11:57

directly distribute any of that you have

11:59

to talk to the manufacturers H and this

12:02

is where that leverage becomes really

12:03

important right because Indonesia did

12:05

not actually have leverage with these

12:07

Pharma companies and so the vaccine

12:09

manufacturer told them that they would

12:11

sell them vaccines but at commercial

12:14

prices that that country cannot afford

12:17

and then a drug manufacturer told them

12:19

that they did not have enough drugs to

12:21

give Indonesia because richer countries

12:24

had placed enough purchase orders that

12:26

there was a delay of 2 years

12:29

so Indonesia was so angry about all of

12:33

this that they declined to share any

12:36

more samples with the

12:39

who so Indonesia basically says we will

12:43

never again make the mistake of promptly

12:45

sharing information about a potentially

12:47

deadly pathogen because we learned that

12:51

we get nothing in return right and that

12:54

understanding that realization also has

12:57

driven a lot of the conversation in the

12:59

drafting of this treaty where low-income

13:02

countries have essentially said we

13:03

recognize that you need us to share

13:06

these samples but we are not going to do

13:08

that unless you can promise to us that

13:10

we will get some access to vaccines and

13:13

drugs that you make based on the samples

13:16

we give you so we want something in

13:18

return for the information we provide to

13:20

you what is a specific proposal that

13:23

comes from this realization yeah this

13:26

proposal has created a lot of

13:28

controversy so there are versions of it

13:31

but the most recent one says essentially

13:34

that if the low-income countries share

13:38

their samples with the

13:39

wh that Pharma companies have to give

13:43

the wh 10% of the vaccines they make as

13:47

a

13:48

donation and then 10% either at a

13:51

nonprofit cost or just a deeply

13:53

discounted rate also to the wh and then

13:56

the who would distribute that 20 % of

13:59

vaccines that they get from the Pharma

14:01

companies to the countries that are in

14:03

most need H so this proposal which feels

14:06

very Innovative is the ultimate

14:08

manifestation of poor countries power in

14:12

this Dynamic if they don't get vaccines

14:15

then the big countries will never get

14:18

the information about a virus that's

14:20

necessary for there to have ever been a

14:21

vaccine it's really interesting it isn't

14:24

and this is the biggest chip that

14:25

low-income countries have so they are

14:27

not willing to budge on this

14:29

but guess who doesn't like this

14:32

pharmaceutical companies and the

14:34

countries that really support the

14:35

interests of the pharmaceutical

14:37

companies and that includes the United

14:39

States Germany Switzerland some of the

14:40

big players places where these companies

14:42

are a big presence and a very powerful

14:44

Lobby What specifically have these

14:47

pharmaceutical companies and the

14:48

countries like the US that have so many

14:50

of them said about this proposal so the

14:54

countries they are willing to give in

14:57

principle and say that the farmers

14:59

pharmaceutical companies will

15:01

voluntarily give some of the vaccines to

15:04

the who but they don't want it mandated

15:07

whereas the low-income countries they

15:09

want it to be really codified so that

15:11

there is no loophole and the

15:14

conversations have gone round and round

15:16

on that one word voluntary aova is it

15:20

safe to assume that a country like the

15:21

US which of course has a booming and

15:23

very profitable pharmaceutical industry

15:26

won't sign on to these proposals

15:30

unless that word voluntary is in the

15:34

deal that they cannot abide by one where

15:36

it's mandatory that these big

15:38

pharmaceutical companies have to give up

15:41

so much of their vaccine to poor

15:43

countries they are not going to say that

15:45

in so many words but yes and the United

15:47

States actually has come up with some

15:49

very nice plans to help some of these

15:52

low-income country set up infrastructure

15:54

and be prepared for pandemics but I

15:56

think Crossing pharmaceutical companies

15:59

is not a place they will go so is that

16:01

really the only big obstacle left in

16:04

these negotiations or is there anything

16:06

else oh there's lots

16:09

more there has been so much

16:12

misinformation and disinformation around

16:14

this whole issue just like there has

16:16

been about every aspect of covid and a

16:19

lot of it centers around the hesitation

16:22

and the opposition that many populist

16:26

leaders have expressed in the US for

16:28

example example there are Republican

16:30

Senators and governors who have come out

16:33

against the treaty and they say that

16:36

this is a power grab by The Who that it

16:39

is going to allow the director general

16:41

of the who to tell the us what to do

16:45

whether to have mask mandates whether to

16:46

have vaccine mandates none of which is

16:48

true by the way and in a bit to counter

16:52

some of that misinformation there is

16:54

actually an explicit line in the treaty

16:57

saying that the treaty respects the

17:00

sovereignty of all the individual

17:02

Nations they've tried to address that

17:04

head-on but it hasn't really made all of

17:07

that chatter go away how much does this

17:10

practically matter the fact that a

17:12

handful or perhaps more than a handful

17:14

of Republicans in the US are skeptical

17:17

of this and think ideologically speaking

17:20

that it oversteps the bounds of what a

17:22

treaty should do I mean ultimately do

17:25

they have any power over whether the US

17:29

signs this treaty they do because

17:32

delegates can agree to this treaty at

17:34

the who but everybody has to bring it

17:36

back to their home countries and in the

17:38

US the treaty then has to be approved

17:41

for ratification by the Senate you have

17:43

to have a two-thirds majority in the

17:45

Senate say yes we agree to this treaty

17:47

so if you have a number of Republican

17:49

Senators who are absolutely opposed to

17:52

it it may not pass so it very much feels

17:55

like so many of the issues that made

17:58

everyone think that this treaty was

18:00

necessary inequities between rich

18:02

countries and poor countries and

18:04

misinformation and ideological

18:06

skepticism of how to handle a pandemic

18:10

to begin with that really defined covid

18:12

for us that those forces are now making

18:15

it very hard for this treaty to actually

18:19

be reached they never really went away

18:22

they never went away it felt like there

18:23

was about 5 Seconds when everyone was

18:26

United in thinking that we need needed

18:29

something different and there was a lot

18:30

of Goodwill but a lot of that has

18:32

evaporated and we're getting very

18:34

quickly to a point where people have

18:36

forgotten what covid looked like and

18:37

felt like and what the devastation was

18:39

like and have gone back to Old positions

18:43

on you know we don't want to share we

18:45

don't want to give anything away

18:46

everything for us first all of the

18:48

thinking that led to the problems during

18:51

covid so what realistically happens now

18:54

and do you based on your reporting think

18:57

that this treaty has any real chance of

19:00

being completed and passed by the 194

19:05

countries involved in it well the draft

19:07

was supposed to be finalized at the

19:10

meeting last week of the World Health

19:11

assembly and that didn't happen but they

19:14

did set a deadline to say that the

19:15

negotiations will continue and then

19:17

they'll hope to have something done by

19:19

next year's meeting but there's just so

19:21

much in flux right now you know there

19:23

are elections all over the world who

19:25

knows what Donald Trump will do if he

19:26

gets elected we know that he would Drew

19:28

from the who the last time around and he

19:31

has even said that he may shut down the

19:32

pandemic preparedness office in the

19:34

white house so he's not particularly

19:35

invested in this whole topic this whole

19:39

[Music]

19:41

issue and in the meantime we already

19:45

have so many threats that are really

19:47

picking up you know for Global Health

19:49

experts and for reporters like myself

19:51

who watch all this stuff it's a bit

19:54

alarming that we now have bird flu right

19:56

here in the United States and the next

20:00

pandemic pretty much every expert I talk

20:02

to agrees it's not a question of if but

20:05

[Music]

20:06

when and if we had had this treaty ready

20:10

if we can ever have this treaty ready we

20:13

would be so much better prepared for

20:15

something like that to happen but it

20:18

just doesn't seem all that likely right

20:20

[Music]

20:26

now well Pora

20:29

thank you very much we appreciate it

20:31

thank

20:31

[Music]

20:37

you we'll be right

20:43

back here's what else you need to know

20:46

today in a last minute about face New

20:50

York Governor Kathy Hogle said she would

20:52

block a long awaited tolling plan known

20:55

as congestion pricing that was set to

20:58

begin at the end of the month the

21:00

program the first of its kind in the US

21:03

would have charged as much as $15 for

21:06

cars entering the busiest parts of

21:08

Manhattan the goal was to alleviate

21:11

traffic reduce pollution and raise money

21:14

for the city's aging subway system but

21:17

hok argued that the tolls threatened the

21:20

city's fragile economic recovery after

21:23

the

21:25

pandemic and on Thursday for former

21:28

romantic partners of Hunter Biden the

21:31

president's son testified in a Delaware

21:34

courtroom about the depth of his drug

21:36

addiction and the toll that it took on

21:39

them the testimony including how much

21:42

Hunter Biden spent on drugs and the type

21:45

of drugs he used was designed to

21:47

establish that he was a chronic drug

21:50

abuser who lied when he claimed to be

21:53

sober on an application for a handgun in

21:56

2018

21:59

today's episode was produced by Alex

22:01

Stern Carlos PRI and Stella tan with

22:04

help from will Reed and Ricky nety it

22:07

was edited by Lexi Di and Devin Taylor

22:10

contains original music by Maran Lozano

22:13

Pat mccusker and Diane Wong and was

22:16

engineered by Chris Wood our theme music

22:19

is by Jim brunberg and Ben lfer of

22:24

[Music]

22:27

wonderly that's that's it for the daily

22:30

I'm Michael Boro see you tomorrow

22:34

[Music]

English (auto-generated)