

Forum: World Health Organization

Agenda: Establishing means to contain the spread of COVID-19, discussing the development of a vaccine and building improved public health systems to avoid future outbreaks.

Director-General: Arjun Raj Loomba

Deputy Director-General: Lakshya Rajoria

Emergency Session of the World Health Organization

Letter to Delegates by the Executive Chair

It gives us immense pleasure to welcome you to the World Health Organization to deliberate on the agenda of containing the spread of Covid-19, building mechanisms to develop a vaccine and constructing improved public health systems.

Covid-19 has reshaped the world around us from the closure of economies to an enforced lockdown. In an increasingly globalised world, this situation brings with it a multitude of difficulties. The idea of losing one's job and staying at home with a lingering uncertainty can take a negative toll on one's life. Apart from physical health there is also a growing concern of mental health. The World Health Organization estimates that over 264 million people across the world are affected by depression, making it the most ubiquitous disease in the world. Experts feel that depression is on the rise with Covid 19. On the contrary, amid all this unease there is a silver lining. Road accidents, the human carbon footprint are all on the decline. However, with industries and lives across the world affected for the worse, it is the WHO's responsibility to lead a global initiative against this crisis.

The Covid 19 situation is a dynamic one. Therefore, if there is a shift in the situation after this guide is released, and a more pressing matter related to containment, the development of vaccines and improving health systems must be discussed then delegates should tailor their arguments accordingly.

This committee will not only entertain a final resolution, but will also accept directives. For instructions on drafting a resolution visit:

<https://bestdelegate.com/model-un-made-easy-how-to-write-a-resolution/>

We are eager to witness a grueling yet constructive debate and creative perspectives on the crisis. We understand the heterogeneous nature of the agenda, however we would look favourably upon well organized arguments that delve into the depth and crux of the issue. The executive board will ensure an engaging and enlightening debate where delegates are tested on not only their research, paperwork and speeches but also their diplomacy and ability to reach a consensus with other delegates. Furthermore, we urge you to use this background guide solely as a basis for your research instead of the sole source of your arguments. We wouldn't look favourably upon delegates using only this background guide. With this Model United Nations Conference being held on an online platform, we understand that this may raise some concerns regarding lobbying or unmoderated sessions, however the organizing committee is doing its best to facilitate a true MUN experience.

Stay Home, Stay Safe and we are excited to see you all on the 18th and 19th of April!

Introduction to the World Health Organization

The World Health Organization is responsible for directing and coordinating authority on international healthcare issues within the United Nations (UN) system, promoting the attainment of the highest possible level of health by all people.¹ Currently the WHO plays a significant role on all fronts in this global COVID-19 outbreak. From identifying, mitigating and managing risks to supporting the delivery of essential services especially in the most impoverished regions of the world is at the forefront of the WHO's role.

¹ WHO, *About WHO, 2015; WHO, Basic Documents – 48th ed. Including amendments adopted up to 31 December 2014, 2014.*

Mandate

WHO's constitution empowers it to act in the interest of public health through research in health-related fields, promotion of preventative health care, provision of specialized aid and assistance in emergencies, and standardization of practices. ²Article 2 of the constitution of the World Health Organization defines it as a “coordinating authority on health work”, therefore it is in its best interests to work in sync with local health authorities. Broadly, facilitating the eradication of diseases and developing proper standards for food and pharmaceuticals falls well in its mandate and therefore is of the utmost importance in this emergency session. ³

The Coronavirus Pandemic: What we know

Sars-CoV-2 or Coronavirus has spread across the world to over 150 nations and is declared a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). It is said to originate from a Wuhan Wildlife market established through the provisions laid out by article 3 and 17 of the Chinese Wildlife protection act.⁴ Its symptoms can include fever, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia or breathing difficulties. More rarely, the disease can be fatal. Social distancing enforced through lockdowns is a key policy used by countries across the world. Additionally, contact tracing especially in countries such as China and creative means such as drive through testing are critical in the mitigation of the crisis. ⁵

Containing the spread of COVID-19

Throughout the world in a bid to impede the growth of COVID-19 countries have largely implemented systems of surveillance and contact tracing, laboratory diagnosis, risk

² <https://www.who.int/about/what-we-do>

³ https://www.who.int/governance/eb/who_constitution_en.pdf

⁴ <https://www.vox.com/videos/2020/3/6/21168006/coronavirus-covid19-china-pandemic>

⁵ economictimes.indiatimes.com > News

communications and community engagement, hospital preparedness, infection prevention and control, and implementation of containment plan. But in addition to these steps, governments have also created strong networks of teams with the responsibilities of counteracting spread of fake news that exacerbate the spread of COVID-19. Many countries have adopted travel bans, curfews and ordering of the shut-down of non-essential businesses to limit occasions where the virus could spread quickly and still the worst of the virus is yet to come.

Countries around the world are adopting different ways to contain the spread of coronavirus but there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Some countries have responded with remarkable efficiency using to their advantage their country's unique policies such as South Korea with their intrusive measures like the central tracking app Corona 100m which publicly informs citizens of known cases around them and perhaps most wide know, their free healthcare system allowing them to conduct drive-through centers testing hundreds of thousands of people. Even China has gone through the efforts of disinfecting whole cities, and bringing the spread of the virus to a standstill. With the US and Italy we see the pattern continue, shutdown of schools, public conferences, cultural events but the effectiveness still varies.

In its position of global coordination in stemming the virus, WHO is actively engaged with communicating with the public and setting clear guidelines for better understanding how to protect oneself. Moreover they play a critical part in coordinating with their partners such as the UN, GOARN, EMT(s) and other development agencies as well as in helping prepare countries through distribution of supplies, technical expertise and training.

Moreover, a key step that the WHO must undertake is establish proper testing mechanisms for the COVID-19 outbreak. These testing mechanisms should be effective especially in Low Economically Developed Countries.

Delegates of the WHO should consider effective and fool-proof methods in building a capable system for containing the spread of COVID - 19.

Individual country/region responses

China - China's initial response with blanket due to government control of the press, until Dr. Youngmen Lee elucidated the true situation in China. However, there has been a sudden decline in cases due to China's industrial internet. Hospitals, civilians, and the government have all been connected due to the Chinese 5G boom. Thereby, enabling better consultation and tracking.

United States of America - The newest epicentre of the Covid - 19 . However, it is testing over 100,000 people every day, the highest number in the world. There is criticism against the US for not preparing well for the outbreak. Numbers suggest that at least 100,000 Americans will die from the coronavirus.

United Kingdom - Leadership is struggling with PM Boris Johnson in the ICU (intensive care unit). The NHS is reaching full capacity and is struggling to keep up. Britain's mid-capacity is only 13,000 tests a day (as of April 2nd week).

Italy, Spain, France and the rest of the EU - Italy witnesses a surge in deaths due to its aging population. Italy failed to contain COVID 19 from its infancy much like Spain and France. On the contrary, Germany is undertaking 500,00 tests each week, reducing the reproductive rate of the virus there. (As of April 2nd week).

Egypt, Ethiopia and the rest of the African Union - Africa CDC has established a division for fighting the Coronavirus: AFCOR. However, Africa may receive a safeguard if its call for \$100 - 150 bn is accepted. A total lockdown is considered extremely difficult in all of Africa.

South Korea - Most effective containment measure. Isolation from ground zero of Covid-19 in the country. Most ubiquitous testing measures taken to slow down the spread of the virus.

The Development of a Vaccine

The rate of development of vaccines in the past has largely differed from disease to disease. The H1B1 (influenza) vaccine technology was well developed and key regulators had previously decided that vaccines made using egg- and cell-based platforms could be licensed under the rules used for a strain change.⁶ However, for vaccines such as that of Ebola, its development was halted from 2013-16 by the Canadian Health ministry. Organizations such as CEPI (an international nongovernmental organization funded by the Wellcome Trust, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the European Commission, and eight countries (Australia, Belgium, Canada, Ethiopia, Germany, Japan, Norway, and the United Kingdom) are developing a framework to develop the vaccines at a faster rate.

The need of the hour in the case of the Coronavirus pandemic are RNA and DNA vaccines due to their quick developmental speeds. Delegates could also explore vaccination development technologies such as better genetic sequencing or reverse genetics to cut development time. However, vaccine development is a lengthy process with many phases of clinical trials required during the development of the vaccine. Here the delegates must also consider other external factors such as side effects such as the potential exacerbation of lung disease by the MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome) vaccine.⁷

One of the most important aspects in the development of the vaccine is the progression of clinical trials. Apart from CEPI, individual private sector firms such as Novavax and Moderna claim to be on the verge of entering human trials. Their key to a rapid development phase is existing research on the SARS-CoV vaccine and the MERS vaccine (part of the Covid-19 family) . The clinical trials that are subject to regulatory approval take place in 3 different phases, from several volunteers to thousands of people. Delegates of the WHO should devise mechanisms to commence trials in this field.⁸

The World Health Organization must also ensure the proper dissemination of information for the development of the vaccines. Politicians tend to over promise, therefore a proper

⁶ <https://www.who.int/immunization/research/development/influenza/en/>

⁷ <https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMp2005630>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/when-will-coronavirus-vaccine-be-ready>

trajectory for the global spread of information is required.⁹ Big Data and AI hold promise in this spread of information, however these mechanisms too have their limitations.

Post the development phase the WHO must also ensure the proper supply of vaccines, unperturbed by ethnic, cultural, economic barriers. CEPI has laid out the required fund at 2bn dollars.¹⁰ However, it must be considered even for the common flu-vaccine if each country doesn't have a manufacturing plant. WHO must ensure modifications to its existing supply chains and logistics systems. The WHO's Global Vaccine action plan (GVAP) will also play a critical role in this.¹¹

In anticipation of future possible epidemics and pandemics, WHO must also ensure that vaccination development prerequisites are underway. News Sources report that with the United States, which came close to developing a vaccine for SARS/MERS that could have provided cross-protection against the new coronavirus but was halted in 2016 due to lack of any major federal and global investments, doesn't happen¹²

Improving public health systems

Public health infrastructure has been fraying at the edges for years due to budget cuts and limited resources making it all the more necessary to prop up investment to improve the public health systems¹³. Still for a multifaceted faceted problem such as that of having an effective and efficient public health system, there needs to be a multifaceted solution. In the current crisis we've seen shortages around the world of medical supplies so that warrants having a robust network between hospitals across the world as well as increased transparency of the capabilities of nations and their public health systems in their ability to combat any future epidemics/pandemics.

⁹ <https://www.wired.com/story/we-need-a-covid-19-vaccine-lets-get-it-right-the-first-time/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/06/when-will-coronavirus-vaccine-be-ready>

¹¹ https://www.who.int/immunization/programmes_systems/supply_chain/en/

¹² <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-care/scientists-were-close-coronavirus-vaccine-years-ago-t-hen-money-dried-n1150091>

¹³ <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/480590-coronavirus-poses-new-test-for-strained-public-health-system>

