



Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic is a sign of how vulnerable and fragile our world is. The virus has upended societies, put the world's population in grave danger and exposed deep inequalities. Division and inequality between and within countries have been exacerbated, and the impact has been severe on people who are already marginalized and disadvantaged. In less than a year and a half, COVID-19 has infected at least 150 million people and killed more than three million. It is the worst combined health and socioeconomic crisis in living memory, and a catastrophe at every level.

The new millennium has seen the havoc which global health threats like severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Ebola and Zika can cause. Experts have been warning of the threat of new pandemic diseases and urged major changes in the way we protect against them – but the change needed has not come about. As soon as a health threat or deadly outbreak fades from memory, complacency takes over in what has been dubbed a cycle of panic and neglect. This cycle must end.

COVID-19 is the 21st century's Chernobyl moment – not because a disease outbreak is like a nuclear accident, but because it has shown so clearly the gravity of the threat to our health and well-being. It has caused a crisis so deep and wide that presidents, prime ministers and heads of international and regional bodies must now urgently accept their responsibility to transform the way in which the world prepares for and responds to global health threats. If not now, then when?

Our message for change is clear: no more pandemics. If we fail to take this goal seriously, we will condemn the world to successive catastrophes.

At the same time, our careful scrutiny of the evidence has revealed failures and gaps in international and national responses that must be corrected. Current institutions, public and private, failed to protect people from a devastating pandemic. Without change, they will not prevent a future one. That is why the Panel is recommending a fundamental transformation designed to ensure commitment at the highest level to a new system that is coordinated, connected, fast-moving, accountable, just, and equitable – in other words, a complete pandemic preparedness and response system on which citizens can rely to keep them safe and healthy.