

**population lockdown on 23 January** to try to contain the virus, as 830 cases and 25 deaths were reported<sup>(32)</sup>. According to the report of the second joint WHO-China mission, which took place from 16 to 24 February, the lockdown and public health measures taken in China were considered successful in rapidly reducing transmission.

Some places began screening incoming visitors almost immediately, as news of the Wuhan outbreak became public. Meanwhile in Thailand, a case was confirmed on 13 January of a woman who had travelled there from Wuhan on 8 January, the **first case to be confirmed outside China**. Japan reported an infected person on 16 January.

#### **4.2.2 The declaration of a public health emergency of international concern**

A Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) is the loudest alarm that can be sounded by the WHO Director-General. The IHR (2005) mandate that in determining whether an event constitutes a PHEIC, the WHO Director-General consider the advice of an **Emergency Committee** convened for the purpose and drawn from a roster of experts maintained by WHO. The affected State is invited to present its views to the Emergency Committee. If a PHEIC is recommended, the WHO Director-General has the final authority to make a declaration, taking all information into account. The meeting of the WHO IHR Emergency Committee called to discuss the outbreak on 22–23 January was split on whether to recommend that the outbreak be declared a PHEIC. The Committee met again the following week when the Director-General returned from a mission to China. Following the Committee's recommendation, the WHO Director-General declared that the outbreak constituted a PHEIC on 30 January. At that time there were 98 cases in 18 countries outside China<sup>(33, 34)</sup>. In the statement from the Emergency Committee reported by the Director-General, it was specified that no travel restrictions were recommended, based on the information available.

Reference to the PHEIC outbreak was included in the 3 February 2020 report by the WHO Director-General to the WHO Executive Board<sup>(35)</sup>. On 4 February in an oral briefing to Member States he reported that there had been 20 471 confirmed cases and 425 deaths reported in China, and a total of 176 cases in 24 other countries.

The IHR (2005) do not use or define the term “pandemic”. The most extensive use of the term by WHO is in relation to the detailed framework and guidelines for pandemic influenza, although even there the distinction between seasonal and pandemic influenza is not clear-cut<sup>(36)</sup>. As COVID-19 spread during February 2020, and there was an apparent lack of understanding that declaring a PHEIC was to sound the loudest possible alarm, there was an increasing clamour for WHO to describe the situation as a pandemic. Eventually, stating that it was alarmed by the extent of both the spread of the disease and the level of inaction in response, WHO