

The United Nations High-level Panel on the Global Response to Health Crises, chaired by President Kikwete of the United Republic of Tanzania, was established in response to the 2014–2016 epidemic of Ebola. It recommended that the United Nations General Assembly should immediately create a high-level council on global public health crises. On receiving its report, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon established a task force to oversee implementation of its recommendations. The task force's report in June 2017 recommended that the Secretary-General implement a time-limited independent mechanism for reporting on the world's preparedness, rather than the high-level independent council which had been recommended by the Kikwete-led panel. The outcome was the establishment of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board in May 2018, with its members appointed by the heads of WHO and the World Bank.

**National pandemic preparedness has been vastly underfunded**, despite the clear evidence that its cost is a fraction of the cost of responses and losses incurred when an epidemic occurs. The total cost of the economic losses due to SARS was estimated at US\$ 60 billion<sup>(14)</sup>. The 2015 MERS outbreak in just one country, the Republic of Korea, with 185 cases and 38 deaths, cost US\$ 2.6 billion in lost tourism revenue and US\$ 1 billion in response costs<sup>(15)</sup>. The 2016 Commission on a Global Health Risk Framework for the Future argued that its proposed preparedness spending boost of US\$ 4.5 billion annually was a small investment compared with a scenario of the potential global cost of pandemics over the whole of the 21st century, which they assessed as being "in excess of \$6 trillion"<sup>(16)</sup>.

*"...the Panel notes that the high risk of major health crises is widely underestimated, and that the world's preparedness and capacity to respond is woefully insufficient. Future epidemics could far exceed the scale and devastation of the West Africa Ebola outbreak."*

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