

Statement

The World Health Organization operates based on science:

A plea to support the global health body during the COVID-19 pandemic

Some of its member states accuse the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations specialized agency for health, of mismanaging the COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. The newly founded *German Alliance for Global Health Research* opposes that view. Instead, it strongly advocates for evidence-based decision making in general, and for supporting the WHO as one of the most critical institutions tasked with protecting and promoting global health.

The world is in the midst of a global health emergency. The drastic measures taken by governments to contain the COVID-19 pandemic restrict freedom and fundamental human rights. They also lead to a range of unwanted adverse effects on health, and cause damage to the economy, nationally as well as internationally. There is a temptation for national governments to blame such collateral damage on others.

While the response to health threats always has to be adapted to local conditions, the COVID-19 pandemic requires strong and coordinated global action. The *German Alliance for Global Health Research* acknowledges that the WHO's leadership and technical expertise is essential for supporting countries in implementing strategies to prevent and manage the further spread of the virus, reduce case fatality, and establish coherent public health responses. It emphasizes that the WHO's guidance is based on the best available evidence.

No other organization has the mandate or ability to take on the important global coordinating role of the WHO. Only with the political and financial support of its member states can the WHO fulfill its role: to preserve and improve the health and well-being of people around the globe. With the International Health Regulations, the member states of the WHO have put in place a strong and legally binding instrument to contain and manage a pandemic. This instrument should be recognized and strengthened as the global community aims to control COVID-19.

Recent announcements by the US Government to withhold funding, and by other governments that question the integrity of the WHO are likely to have deleterious effects on WHO's work in many areas of global health, predominantly in low and middle-income countries. In the current crisis, these countries need particular solidarity and support, including research cooperation, coordination support and evidence-based technical advice. These countries are now faced with severe consequences of drastic cuts to the WHO budget.

We call upon the German and all European governments to support the WHO to the best of their means while actively engaging in a critical constructive dialogue in order to ensure transparency, accountability, and possibly further reform. And we call upon the Global Health community to firmly stand by the WHO in this time of crisis.

German Alliance for Global Health Research (www.globalhealth.de)

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