



THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

May 18, 2020

His Excellency
Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General of the World Health Organization
Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Dr. Tedros:

On April 14, 2020, I suspended United States contributions to the World Health Organization pending an investigation by my Administration of the organization's failed response to the COVID-19 outbreak. This review has confirmed many of the serious concerns I raised last month and identified others that the World Health Organization should have addressed, especially the World Health Organization's alarming lack of independence from the People's Republic of China. Based on this review, we now know the following:

- The World Health Organization consistently ignored credible reports of the virus spreading in Wuhan in early December 2019 or even earlier, including reports from the Lancet medical journal. The World Health Organization failed to independently investigate credible reports that conflicted directly with the Chinese government's official accounts, even those that came from sources within Wuhan itself.
- By no later than December 30, 2019, the World Health Organization office in Beijing knew that there was a "major public health" concern in Wuhan. Between December 26 and December 30, China's media highlighted evidence of a new virus emerging from Wuhan, based on patient data sent to multiple Chinese genomics companies. Additionally, during this period, Dr. Zhang Jixian, a doctor from Hubei Provincial Hospital of Integrated Chinese and Western Medicine, told China's health authorities that a new coronavirus was causing a novel disease that was, at the time, afflicting approximately 180 patients.
- By the next day, Taiwanese authorities had communicated information to the World Health Organization indicating human-to-human transmission of a new virus. Yet the World Health Organization chose not to share any of this critical information with the rest of the world, probably for political reasons.
- The International Health Regulations require countries to report the risk of a health emergency within 24 hours. But China did not inform the World Health Organization of

Wuhan's several cases of pneumonia, of unknown origin, until December 31, 2019, even though it likely had knowledge of these cases days or weeks earlier.

- According to Dr. Zhang Yongzhen of the Shanghai Public Health Clinic Center, he told Chinese authorities on January 5, 2020, that he had sequenced the genome of the virus. There was no publication of this information until six days later, on January 11, 2020, when Dr. Zhang self-posted it online. The next day, Chinese authorities closed his lab for "rectification." As even the World Health Organization acknowledged, Dr. Zhang's posting was a great act of "transparency." But the World Health Organization has been conspicuously silent both with respect to the closure of Dr. Zhang's lab and his assertion that he had notified Chinese authorities of his breakthrough six days earlier.
- The World Health Organization has repeatedly made claims about the coronavirus that were either grossly inaccurate or misleading.
 - On January 14, 2020, the World Health Organization gratuitously reaffirmed China's now-debunked claim that the coronavirus could not be transmitted between humans, stating: "Preliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel coronavirus (2019-nCov) identified in Wuhan, China." This assertion was in direct conflict with censored reports from Wuhan.
 - On January 21, 2020, President Xi Jinping of China reportedly pressured you not to declare the coronavirus outbreak an emergency. You gave in to this pressure the next day and told the world that the coronavirus did not pose a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Just over one week later, on January 30, 2020, overwhelming evidence to the contrary forced you to reverse course.
 - On January 28, 2020, after meeting with President Xi in Beijing, you praised the Chinese government for its "transparency" with respect to the coronavirus, announcing that China had set a "new standard for outbreak control" and "bought the world time." You did not mention that China had, by then, silenced or punished several doctors for speaking out about the virus and restricted Chinese institutions from publishing information about it.
- Even after you belatedly declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, you failed to press China for the timely admittance of a World Health Organization team of international medical experts. As a result, this critical team did not arrive in China until two weeks later, on February 16, 2020. And even then, the team was not allowed to visit Wuhan until the final days of their visit. Remarkably, the World Health Organization was silent when China denied the two American members of the team access to Wuhan entirely.
- You also strongly praised China's strict domestic travel restrictions, but were inexplicably against my closing of the United States border, or the ban, with respect to people coming from China. I put the ban in place regardless of your wishes. Your political gamesmanship on this issue was deadly, as other governments, relying on your

comments, delayed imposing life-saving restrictions on travel to and from China. Incredibly, on February 3, 2020, you reinforced your position, opining that because China was doing such a great job protecting the world from the virus, travel restrictions were “causing more harm than good.” Yet by then the world knew that, before locking down Wuhan, Chinese authorities had allowed more than five million people to leave the city and that many of these people were bound for international destinations all over the world.

- As of February 3, 2020, China was strongly pressuring countries to lift or forestall travel restrictions. This pressure campaign was bolstered by your incorrect statements on that day telling the world that the spread of the virus outside of China was “minimal and slow” and that “the chances of getting this going to anywhere outside China [were] very low.”
- On March 3, 2020, the World Health Organization cited official Chinese data to downplay the very serious risk of asymptomatic spread, telling the world that “COVID-19 does not transmit as efficiently as influenza” and that unlike influenza this disease was not primarily driven by “people who are infected but not yet sick.” China’s evidence, the World Health Organization told the world, “showed that only one percent of reported cases do not have symptoms, and most of those cases develop symptoms within two days.” Many experts, however, citing data from Japan, South Korea, and elsewhere, vigorously questioned these assertions. It is now clear that China’s assertions, repeated to the world by the World Health Organization, were wildly inaccurate.
- By the time you finally declared the virus a pandemic on March 11, 2020, it had killed more than 4,000 people and infected more than 100,000 people in at least 114 countries around the world.
- On April 11, 2020, several African Ambassadors wrote to the Chinese Foreign Ministry about the discriminatory treatment of Africans related to the pandemic in Guangzhou and other cities in China. You were aware that Chinese authorities were carrying out a campaign of forced quarantines, evictions, and refusal of services against the nationals of these countries. You have not commented on China’s racially discriminatory actions. You have, however, baselessly labeled as racist Taiwan’s well-founded complaints about your mishandling of this pandemic.
- Throughout this crisis, the World Health Organization has been curiously insistent on praising China for its alleged “transparency.” You have consistently joined in these tributes, notwithstanding that China has been anything but transparent. In early January, for example, China ordered samples of the virus to be destroyed, depriving the world of critical information. Even now, China continues to undermine the International Health Regulations by refusing to share accurate and timely data, viral samples and isolates, and by withholding vital information about the virus and its origins. And, to this day, China continues to deny international access to their scientists and relevant facilities, all while casting blame widely and recklessly and censoring its own experts.

- The World Health Organization has failed to publicly call on China to allow for an independent investigation into the origins of the virus, despite the recent endorsement for doing so by its own Emergency Committee. The World Health Organization’s failure to do so has prompted World Health Organization member states to adopt the “COVID-19 Response” Resolution at this year’s World Health Assembly, which echoes the call by the United States and so many others for an impartial, independent, and comprehensive review of how the World Health Organization handled the crisis. The resolution also calls for an investigation into the origins of the virus, which is necessary for the world to understand how best to counter the disease.

Perhaps worse than all these failings is that we know that the World Health Organization could have done so much better. Just a few years ago, under the direction of a different Director-General, the World Health Organization showed the world how much it has to offer. In 2003, in response to the outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in China, Director-General Harlem Brundtland boldly declared the World Health Organization’s first emergency travel advisory in 55 years, recommending against travel to and from the disease epicenter in southern China. She also did not hesitate to criticize China for endangering global health by attempting to cover up the outbreak through its usual playbook of arresting whistleblowers and censoring media. Many lives could have been saved had you followed Dr. Brundtland’s example.

It is clear the repeated missteps by you and your organization in responding to the pandemic have been extremely costly for the world. The only way forward for the World Health Organization is if it can actually demonstrate independence from China. My Administration has already started discussions with you on how to reform the organization. But action is needed quickly. We do not have time to waste. That is why it is my duty, as President of the United States, to inform you that, if the World Health Organization does not commit to major substantive improvements within the next 30 days, I will make my temporary freeze of United States funding to the World Health Organization permanent and reconsider our membership in the organization. I cannot allow American taxpayer dollars to continue to finance an organization that, in its present state, is so clearly not serving America’s interests.

Sincerely,

