



Statement to the 74th Session of the World Health Assembly, 24 May to 1 June 2021
on agenda item 17.3 WHO's work in health emergencies

The Covid-19 pandemic illustrates the importance of building effective, well funded global systems to manage health emergencies.

Strengthening public health systems is fundamental to future pandemic preparedness. The 2019 annual report on implementation of IHR indicated that countries are performing better in detection than response capacities. Focusing on surveillance rather than response favours countries with adequate resources to mount an effective public health response, and does little to build capacity in countries that do not. WHO must focus on response capacity building and improved funding for robust public health systems that are the cornerstone of any emergency response.

The IHR Review Committee (IHRRC) missed the opportunity to broaden the understanding of prevention and response preparedness to health emergencies in this light.

We are concerned that the recommendations of IHRRC and the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPPR) to introduce a global convention and to incorporate the Global Health Threats Council, respectively, risk fragmenting WHO's pandemic preparedness and response functions instead of strengthening them.

We welcome the recommendation to increase transparency of the Emergency Committee's decision-making, and the rejection of the proposal to adopt intermediary alerts. The proposed WARN system is highly invasive of national sovereignty.

We applaud sharing of genetic sequences and pathogen samples with regard to future zoonotic spillover, but reiterate the importance of sharing the resulting health technologies with affected LMICs. Existing provisions of the IHRs and of the Nagoya Protocol must be implemented to promote this.

Covid vaccine certification must be addressed in the context of alleviating vaccine inequity, societal inequalities, and privacy concerns.

We are concerned over the IHRRC's lax examination of countries compliance with human rights provisions in the IHR during Covid-19 response. We urge the Assembly to initiate a comprehensive global review of this issue.