

April 15, 2020

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Trump:

During this unprecedented global crisis, it is imperative for the U.S. to demonstrate leadership by working with the global community not only to stop the spread of COVID-19, but also to help strengthen the global public health architecture to mitigate a crisis of this magnitude from happening again. Therefore, we, the undersigned organizations, urge the U.S. Administration to continue to fund the World Health Organization (WHO) to end this pandemic.

The United States cannot rid this insidious virus from our own country, nor around the world, without WHO.

WHO is the only organization with the technical capacity and global mandate to support the public health response of all countries during this critical time. China first alerted WHO to the possibility of a novel type of coronavirus on December 31, 2019, WHO worked closely with U.S. public health institutions like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as the global community, to collect, analyze, and disseminate public health information about COVID-19.

These actions equipped countries with advance warning and guided states' efforts to prepare for the spread of the virus. Just one day after receiving the alert from China, WHO alerted the CDC and by January 10, WHO issued guidance to countries on how to detect, test, and manage potential cases of the novel virus, and best practices to protect health workers delivering care on the frontlines of the response.

As the threat became more understood, WHO continued to engage with the Chinese government to ensure vital public health data from the Wuhan epicenter was conveyed to the global community at rapid pace – unlike during the 2002-2004 SARS epidemic. Through this engagement, China shared genetic sequencing of the novel virus, accelerating the development of vaccine candidates and therapeutics. While their transparency in many areas was still lacking, this paved the way for a WHO technical team to visit Wuhan in late January and again in February to study the disease, gaining knowledge that informed containment and response measures not being implemented by member states globally. The February visit also included scientists from NIH and CDC.

Led by WHO, work began immediately to design a global Research & Development Blueprint. Hundreds of researchers from dozens of countries participated, paving the way for what is now more than 70 vaccine candidates being worked on in dozens of countries, with three in clinical trials. This pace is both essential and unprecedented and would not have been possible without rapid WHO engagement.

At the same time, WHO began essential, rapid work to design more than 50 pieces of technical guidance to help countries and communities prepare – resources that are used not only all over the world, but all over the United States by hospitals and frontline staff throughout various cities and states – often done collaboratively with CDC technical experts.

Given the lack of scientifically proven and effective treatments, by March 18, WHO launched a study called the “Solidarity Trial” to compare the effectiveness of four potential treatments for COVID-19 against one another. Over 90 countries are now participating in this trial.

During an unprecedented and hugely complex public health crisis like this, there are bound to be challenges. After WHO and the global community turn the tide against COVID-19, WHO has signaled an eagerness to assess where mistakes occurred and how best to strengthen the institution and global public health response capacities of all countries in the future.

It is without question, however, that WHO efforts have been vital to flattening the curve, slowing the virus’s spread, and ultimately saving lives in the U.S. and around the world.

As the virus continues to spread into poorer countries ill equipped to combat the disease, WHO’s role will become even more vital as it supports fragile health systems already struggling to provide basic health interventions to vulnerable populations. In this capacity, WHO’s interventions will not only save lives but also ensure economic stability as the world recovers from this devastating disease.

With a COVID-19 vaccine still at least 12-16 months away, all countries must strengthen efforts to stop the spread of the virus, save lives, and restart the global economy. At a time of the worst public health disaster in the last 100 years, suspending funding to WHO would be like cutting the water supply to a firefighter in the middle of a fire. We believe it is critical to continue to support WHO’s work, especially as they partner closely with leading U.S. agencies like CDC, NIH, USAID and the Department of State, to keep people safe around the world and here at home.

Sincerely,

cc:

Secretary of State, the Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Honorable Alex Azar
Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Senate Majority Leader, the Honorable Mitch McConnell
House Minority Leader, the Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Senate Minority Leader, the Honorable Charles Schumer