

Step in the Right Direction for the New Pandemic Treaty

Statement by Panel for a Global Public Health Convention

From spiking COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths due to Omicron subvariants to the ongoing monkeypox outbreak now recorded in nearly 80 countries, disease outbreaks are becoming more frequent and persistent. Now more than ever, effective global systems are needed to contain health threats and keep people everywhere safe. An international agreement which nails down clear lines of accountability is critical to enable countries at every income level to detect, alert and respond to health threats before they become global pandemics.

The Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB), which is made up of WHO Member States working to draft and negotiate a pandemic treaty, recently concluded its second meeting. Following this milestone, the Panel for a Global Public Health Convention (GPHC) welcomes the broad consensus that a legally binding agreement is indispensable to address the current gaps in pandemic preparedness and response, from the local to global level. The Panel strongly supports the INB's determination that the most appropriate instrument to codify an agreement among countries would come under Article 19 of WHO's Constitution. Under Article 19, countries would need to ratify the pandemic treaty at the national level in order to be legally bound.

As the INB stated, while countries have the sovereign right to determine and manage their approach to public health, they have a responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage outside their borders. Since no one country can keep us out of a pandemic, and any one country can keep us in it, a legally binding collective response is necessary, smart and the best way to protect global health security and safeguard economies and societies.

For the global agreement to succeed, the Panel believes that preparedness and response standards must be set by the World Health Organization, and countries and international bodies held accountable by an independent monitoring and assessment body at arm's length to WHO. Countries should not only be accountable for the actions they take, but for the time frame within which they take them. There is a need to move faster than we did in 2020 against COVID-19, in a matter of hours or days, rather than weeks.

As the INB and member states move forward, honest discussions between countries are needed to determine which accountability mechanisms will be most equitable and useful to ensure such standards are met, as well as exactly what level of accountability countries are prepared to accept.

The monkeypox outbreak is a sobering reminder that a global, coordinated response to contain health threats and deliver countermeasures equitably is essential to stopping outbreaks from becoming global pandemics. Preparedness and response is not charity, it is a global good that demands countries work in solidarity and take responsibility.