

Good Start but Accountability Gap Undermines Potential of Pandemic Treaty

3 February 2023 – This week, Japan saw record numbers of people dying from COVID-19, the United States announced plans to end its COVID-19 emergency declaration in May and the World Health Organization (WHO) said that for now, COVID-19 will continue to be classified as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), the organization’s highest level of alert. As we enter the fourth year of the pandemic, our global response remains inconsistent, hampered by inequitable access to health technologies and continues to put a huge burden on overburdened health workers and health systems.

Yesterday, the intergovernmental negotiating body (INB), the entity tasked with drafting and negotiating a pandemic treaty, published its “zero draft” for countries to consider before negotiations officially kick off at the end of this month. The Panel for a Global Public Health Convention (GPHC) lauds the INB’s recognition that equity must prevail at every level of decision-making to adequately and justly tackle global health threats. In particular, the draft analyses the challenges of COVID-19 and aims to ensure that the global supply of lifesaving tools, like vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, are predictably and equitably shared during a crisis.

While the Panel strongly supports the INB’s commitment to equity, there are worrying gaps in its effort to ensure accountability mechanisms are agreed from the start. Accountability is one of the most sparingly used terms in the treaty, and when it is used, it’s clear that real decisions on compliance will be kicked down the road. Principles and concrete mechanisms for accountability must be reflected in a treaty, and not left solely to the International Health Regulations (IHR), which have so far not held countries to account.

Countries must know what they are responsible for and who they are responsible to before the treaty is finalized, not after. The world must wake up, as global health security is only as strong as its weakest link. Without accountability from the start, we’re back to square one.

The **Panel for a Global Health Convention** was launched in April 2021 and is working with leaders around the world to develop a global public health convention by bridging critical gaps in global public health architecture and policy frameworks.

Media Contact

Anicca Liu, MPH, MA

Project Manager

Panel for a Global Public Health Convention

aniccaliu@gphcpanel.org