



## Update from the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response

World Health Organization Executive Board EBSS/5/3 Special Session on the COVID-19 Response  
October 6, 2020

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia  
The Right Honourable Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand

***The Right Honourable Helen Clark:***

Chair of the Executive Board.  
Director-General,  
Members of the Board,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of President Sirleaf and me, thank you for enabling us to present to you as the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response.

Thank you for the comments received yesterday on the work of the Panel in the context of statements addressing Agenda Item Three of this Special Session of the Executive Board.

We are presenting to you while this devastating pandemic rolls on, having now caused the deaths of more than one million people around the world.

Since our appointment in July, we have begun this important and complex task to lead a comprehensive, impartial, and independent review of the internationally co-ordinated health response to COVID-19, as set out in World Health Assembly Resolution 73.1.

This is a daunting task, but it is also a unique opportunity which must not be lost. We are living with the consequences of a health crisis which affects all dimensions of life for just about every person on earth. Many of us meeting here today will know personally of someone who had been severely impacted by the disease; some may also have lost family members, colleagues, and/or friends.

Having been a Head of Government and Minister of Health myself, I am passionate about investing in robust and resilient national health and social protection systems which enable us to cope not only with this pandemic, but also with the inevitable next outbreak of a disease with the same potential to spread as COVID-19 has.

As members of the WHO Executive Board, you all appreciate that we need health systems which focus not just on a specific pathogen, but systems which provide people with access to essential health

services in general – that is, with universal health coverage. We must invest in health systems at large, to enable people to lead healthier lives, no matter where in the world they are.

Let me now hand over to President Sirleaf who will give an account of our Panel's steps thus far, including the determination of its Terms of Reference, the selection of panellists, and the establishment of the Secretariat.

Thereafter, I will then brief you on our first Panel meeting, the development of our plans going forward, and our suggestions for how we can continue to engage with Member States and the broader community concerned with global health and health security.

For now, over to you President Sirleaf.

***Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf:***

Thank you, Prime Minister Clark. Greetings to all of you from Monrovia, Liberia.

Let me also thank the Executive Board for enabling us as Co-Chairs of The Independent Panel to brief you today.

I bring to the work of the Independent Panel the experience of a President who was faced with leading the efforts to fight an unknown enemy: the Ebola virus.

I will speak on three important steps relating to the Independent Panel's formation: the process that went into developing its Terms of Reference, the process used to select the panellists and the diversity of talent and expertise they bring to the task, and the establishment of the Secretariat.

First of all, we based our Terms of Reference on World Health Assembly Resolution 73.1. My Co-Chair and I prepared a draft of the Terms of Reference with support from our advisors and the Secretariat.

We then shared the draft with Member States and requested your comments. We would like to thank all the Member States who provided feedback. We took it into account when finalising the Terms of Reference; these are now available online on The Independent Panel's website.

As you can see from this slide and from our Terms of Reference, we will need to work closely with the Review Committee on the International Health Regulations and the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee. We have already connected with these bodies at Chair and Secretariat level.

Second, I would like to brief you on the process used to select the panellists.

With the support of our advisors, we considered more than 120 names of excellent potential panel members. We thank Member States for their panel nominations. We had the difficult task of narrowing that list to the 11 who have joined us on the Panel.

When processing your nominations and considering names, we had clear criteria in mind for the skills needed on the Panel.

There were the criteria set out in the Circular Letter to Member States, such as the importance of selecting independent panellists who are not current political appointees.

We endeavoured to have broad geographical representation to be gender balanced.

Then we wanted specific competencies and skill sets represented, including clinical and research expertise and experience of steering national health systems, but also relevant additional competencies in economics, diplomacy and knowledge of the international system, and experience of working directly with communities affected by disease outbreaks.

Such skills and experience are needed in the ongoing response to COVID-19 around the world, and it is important that they are represented on the Panel.

We are pleased to have chosen eleven exceptional panellists representing a wealth of experience and technical expertise in leadership, global health, public administration, and in leading response to difficult disease outbreaks and crises; economics; the wellbeing of girls and women; in national and international health policy and in investigating some of the first known clusters of COVID-19.

This is an excellent team of esteemed and independent people from around the world with the wide mix of skills we sought, and comprised of seven women and six men.

It is a strong, diverse, and independent panel, and it is now poised to ask the hard questions. Its work will be informed by and draw from additional knowledge and expertise of Member States and the wider health, scientific, and civil society communities.

Finally, I want to cover the establishment of the Secretariat.

We have a Secretariat led by Anders Nordström which is now supporting the work of the panel. It too is made up of people with diverse skillsets from around the world.

Ensuring the independence of the work of the Panel is important. The Secretariat therefore has its own office outside WHO. It is financed exclusively by assessed contributions by Member States. The Secretariat reports directly to us, the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel.

The Secretariat will support us to engage with Member States on the Independent Panel's plans and work in the weeks and months ahead.

Your knowledge and suggestions are most welcome and important, and we will continue to engage with Member States regularly.

I now hand over to my Co-Chair, Right Honourable Helen Clark, to talk more about our first Panel meeting and our next steps, including how you might help us achieve our objectives.

***The Right Honourable Helen Clark:***

Thank you, President Sirleaf.

I will now give an overview of the first Panel meeting, held virtually on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September.

All panel members attended, and it was a productive meeting.

We first reflected on our experiences with the pandemic, and how that informs our work as panellists. Panel members shared personal stories of how they and their families had been impacted by the pandemic, including by the death of family members.

Each said not only that they felt honoured to be part of the work, but also that there were deeply committed to reviewing the international response and making recommendations for the future. We finished the meeting knowing that the Panel as a collective is approaching the complex task set out in the Resolution 73.1 and the Terms of Reference in a genuine and serious manner.

The Panel agreed that, as is set out in the Terms of Reference, we will focus on coming to an objective understanding of the key events which have led to the pandemic and where it stands today, and distill lessons learned from that on which we will base our recommendations.

The Panel agrees that the recommendations we make should be practical and able to be implemented. These recommendations could help with course correction as the pandemic continues, whilst also contributing to better preparedness for the next potential pandemic.

At this inaugural meeting, the Panel agreed to focus on three main themes of enquiry:

- Changing for the future: developing an analysis and vision for a robust and strengthened international system equipped to support effective pandemic preparedness and response;
- Reviewing the present: providing an analysis of the present response to the COVID-19 pandemic from the initial phase through to the present, including the global alerts, the spread, country responses, and wider societal impacts; and
- Learning from the past: lessons from previous outbreaks and pandemics, to help understand why SARS-CoV-2 spread globally and had such an impact, including the characteristics of the response of the World Health Organization and of relevant institutional and national responses.

We as a Panel, with the support of our advisors and secretariat, have been busy structuring these themes into a detailed Programme of Work.

We look forward to sharing this Programme with you shortly.

At this first meeting, the Panel also discussed its methods of work.

We agreed to use a variety of research and information collection mechanisms, as you can see on this slide.

These will be guided throughout by high standards of rigour and objectivity and by our commitment to impartial truth-seeking.

We will work collaboratively with parallel mechanisms, including with the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, the International Health Regulations Review Committee, and the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee.

President Sirleaf has mentioned how we have already connected with each of these bodies, and our Secretariats are in frequent contact. While we all have distinct responsibilities and mandates, we are all keen to draw on each other's work and avoid duplication.

We look forward to hearing from our colleagues from the IHR Review Committee and IOAC immediately after our presentation here today.

With regard to our timeline, the Panel has agreed to meet approximately every six weeks, with each meeting having a clear agenda and set of papers based on the Programme of Work. The next meeting is scheduled for the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of October.

We look forward to sharing that meeting report with Member States, and continuing to engage with you at the monthly briefings. We also look forward to reporting to the resumed 73<sup>rd</sup> World Health Assembly meeting next month, before presenting to you again at the next Executive Board meeting in January.

Throughout this process, we wish to engage with and learn from you, the Member States.

We are committed to being open and transparent. You will have seen that we have already published the report of our first meeting and the background papers for it on the Panel's website.

Today we are announcing that we are inviting Member States to make submissions to the Panel based on your experiences of the pandemic and suggestions you have for moving forward. These contributions will be important inputs for the Panel. They will be made public in order to stimulate learning and knowledge sharing.

More details about the call for submissions are on the The Independent Panel's website.

In due course, we will also provide processes for receiving input from other stakeholders and the general public. We believe this is very important.

To conclude, President Sirleaf and I are pleased with the engagement, quality, and diversity of our panellists and with the outcomes of the first Panel meeting.

We look forward now to hearing from the chairs of the IHR Review Committee and the IOAC, and then to hearing feedback from you, members of Executive Board.

Thank you, for listening. I now hand the floor back to the Chair of the Board.