



## Welcome Remarks by Co-Chairs

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

To the 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response  
20 October 2020

The Right Honourable Helen Clark:

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

On behalf of President Sirleaf and me, it is a pleasure to open this second meeting of our Panel and to welcome you all to it – our particular thanks go to our colleagues in the Americas where it is early in the morning.

As we meet, we know that the pandemic continues to rage around the world. The harsh milestone of forty million people known to be infected with COVID-19 has just passed. The importance of our work to review the internationally co-ordinated response to the pandemic was reiterated by Member States at the Special Session of the WHO Executive Board two weeks ago when President Sirleaf and I presented on behalf of the Panel.

We thank Panelists and the Secretariat for their contributions thus far in getting our work up and running expeditiously. We are expected to report to the World Health Assembly in May. We understand that means that our report must be ready in April - barely six months from now.

That brings me to our agenda for our meeting today and tomorrow. We will focus on two linked substantive agenda items each day, for each of which we have received papers. We will start today by acknowledging our first meeting report, and touching base on the Program of Work - “our roadmap” - where all your inputs have been very helpful.

Then we move to discuss an important part of our work – the development of an authoritative chronology of what has happened, and when, in the course of the pandemic. We will begin that item with a short Secretariat presentation on approaches to developing the chronology.

That will be followed by a discussion on how we can capture and examine national responses to the pandemic and where we need to take a deep dive into these issues. We will ask for your practical feedback so that we can take these key issues forward as effectively as possible.

I will now hand over to President Sirleaf for her welcoming remarks and to take us through the plan for Day Two.

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf:

Thank you, Prime Minister Clark.

Greetings, distinguished Panelists. I join Prime Minister Clark in welcoming all of you to our 2<sup>nd</sup> Panel meeting.

As Prime Minister Clark has emphasized, a lot has happened since our 1<sup>st</sup> Panel Meeting. We cannot thank each of you enough for the level of commitment you bring to these issues – which are truly a defining moment of our time.

Our collective task is urgent. Every day counts. Since we last met, 10 million more people have been diagnosed with COVID-19, and 160 thousand have died. A record number of new cases – more than 400,000 – were reported in just one day last week. The pandemic continues to roll on with its growing human toll on lives and livelihoods.

There is much information, some may argue too much information, that we need to pull together and analyse rigorously and grasp quickly. But we simply must do it.

Seven and a half billion people are relying on us to make sense of the pandemic in terms of what happened, when it happened, why it happened, how did we get here. We are the ones who can shape what humanity can do so that next time, the world can be better prepared to avert another possible tragedy. We must constantly remind ourselves that we are privileged to be charged with making this contribution, and to not let that thought overwhelm us.

Our Program of Work is a live document. We will revisit it as the work progresses. There is still much we don't yet know about this pandemic. For now, let's consider the Program of Work to be the road map for the Independent Panel which we update as we refine our perspectives and more data comes to hand.

To make it easier to communicate the Program we have returned the order of the elements to read from past to present to future. But we are still up-front prioritising what changes to the international system might be needed as you can see from the agenda of this meeting.

We need to be guided by our objective – to set in train actionable recommendations that strengthen international systems, reinforce national and subnational responses, and help to safeguard a healthier world.

At the Special Session of the Executive Board two weeks ago, the Member States were clear as to what they expect from us. They expect us to make recommendations that matter. They expect us to focus on implementation, including assigning owners, proposed timescales for completion, and financial and human resources required for all our recommendations. And

they expect us to be unafraid to tell uncomfortable truths. Our Day 2, therefore, will build on the takeaways from Day 1 with a focus on the analyses and recommendations needed for WHO and the international system.

On the international system, we have the report of the thought-provoking mini symposium on international systems, which we want to thank you for attending and David Miliband for hosting. The leaders and experts at the symposium made suggestions for key areas where the Panel can have maximum impact. The objective of our discussion here is to agree on where we need to study further, who we need to bring together, and how we arrive at the best evidence to marshal strong arguments.

On WHO, a paper providing an overview of potential questions for enquiry regarding WHO as an institution will be presented. Our shared *objective is to reach* agreement on the main questions, methodology, and timelines for evaluating the role of WHO in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

And now I hand back to Prime Minister Helen Clark for our first agenda item - the report of the 1<sup>st</sup> Panel meeting.

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