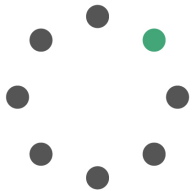




Meeting Report

First Meeting of the Independent Panel
for Pandemic Preparedness and Response
17 September 2020



Report Summary

The First Meeting of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (hereafter “The Independent Panel”) was convened by Co-Chairs Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the Right Honorable Helen Clark in a virtual meeting on 17 September 2020. All panel members were in attendance.

The Co-Chairs welcomed panel members. In her opening remarks Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf noted the importance of The Independent Panel in its evidence-based quest to protect human health. In her opening remarks the Right Honorable Helen Clark said The Independent Panel must shed light on what has happened and why. The background to the establishment of the panel in the May 2020 World Health Assembly Resolution A73.1 was reviewed. Each panel member expressed their commitment to the task of The Independent Panel.

The meeting received and noted the Terms of Reference for The Independent Panel. A background paper on the present status of the COVID-19 pandemic was presented. The meeting discussed the proposed programme of work for the panel and associated timelines and working methods. The Panel agreed to focus on three main themes of enquiry: an analysis and vision for a strengthened international system ideally equipped for pandemic preparedness and response; a review of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic from the initial phase through to the present, including the global alerts, the spread, country responses and wide societal impact; and lessons to be learnt in why SARS-CoV-2 spread globally and had its devastating impact, including an understanding of characteristics of the virus and of governmental and institutional responses at all levels.

The meeting agreed that The Independent Panel would meet regularly and present updates to the resumed session of the 73rd World Health Assembly scheduled for November 2020 and the World Health Organization Executive Board in January 2021, and report to the 74th World Health Assembly scheduled for May 2021. The panel agreed to use a variety of research and information collection mechanisms, guided throughout by high standards of rigour and objectivity and committed to impartial truth-seeking.

The Secretariat to The Independent Panel was introduced together with proposed operational mechanisms and a communication strategy.

The meeting was closed by the Co-Chairs who summarized the agreed tasks ahead and thanked Panel members for their commitment.

Report

Background

The 73rd World Health Assembly on 19 May 2020 adopted Resolution WHA73.1 which inter alia requested the Director General:

(10) to initiate, at the earliest appropriate moment, and in consultation with Member States,¹ a stepwise process of impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation, including using existing mechanisms,² as appropriate, to review experience gained and lessons learned from the WHO-coordinated international health response to COVID-19 – including (i) the effectiveness of the mechanisms at WHO’s disposal; (ii) the functioning of the International Health Regulations (2005) and the status of implementation of the relevant recommendations of previous IHR Review Committees; (iii) WHO’s contribution to United Nations-wide efforts; and (iv) the actions of WHO and their timelines pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic– and to make recommendations to improve capacity for global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, including through strengthening, as appropriate, the WHO Health Emergencies Programme;

(11) to report to the Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly on the implementation of this resolution.

On 9 July 2020 the WHO Director-General announced that he had requested former Prime Minister of New Zealand the Right Honorable Helen Clark and former President of Liberia Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to co-chair the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response to evaluate the world’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Co-Chairs were asked to operate independently, including in choosing other Panel members as well as members of an independent secretariat to provide support. On 3 September 2020 the panel Co-Chairs announced the names of the eleven panelists appointed to the panel, each of whom will serve on the panel in their individual capacity and not representing either their government or specific organizational interests.

Agenda Item 1: Welcome remarks by co-chairs

In her opening remarks, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf reflected on her experience as President of Liberia during the 2013-2016 West Africa Ebola epidemic and learning at first-hand that our global system of preparedness and response is only as strong as its weakest link. She stressed that The Independent Panel is tasked to provide an evidence-based path for the future to ensure that countries and global institutions, including specifically the WHO, effectively address health threats and protect human health; that the Panel should draw on world-class scientific and technical expertise, that it must be independent and impartial, and that its

starting point is the assumption that the world could have done better in confronting COVID-19.

Opening remarks by the Right Honourable Helen Clark acknowledged that the panel's work is commencing in what amounts to a 'perfect storm' of challenge and complexity. She noted that the Panel must shed light on what has happened and why, but should not see this exercise as a blame game. She said a key message for the panel was that it should be ready to listen and learn from a wide range of people to understand what worked and didn't work in the response to COVID 19, including by being prepared to ask the tough questions. She proposed that The Independent Panel should focus on finding the facts, and, most importantly, making recommendations for the future in order to help both with course correction as the current pandemic continues, and to ensure that the world is much better prepared for the next pandemic.

Agenda Item 2: Introduction by and of Panel members

Co-Chair the Rt Hon Helen Clark invited each Panel member to introduce themselves.

Panel members spoke about their very diverse backgrounds and experience relevant to the work of the Panel. Panellists remarked on the complementarity of their skills, expertise, and experience, and the wide range of perspectives they brought to this work, including from different aspects of dealing with health emergencies, including health system, economic, social, and community responses. They noted their involvement in institutional responses at community, national, and international levels. Panel members agreed on the need to reflect the experience of different regions and age groups, and widely varying social, cultural and economic contexts in the response.

A number of panel members reflected on their personal experience of the pandemic including the very direct impact of infection on close family members, including the experience of panellists in losing close family members to COVID-19. In expressing condolences for these losses, Co-Chair the Rt Hon Helen Clark reflected on the experience of loss and grief by Panel members as one which is shared by millions of others across the world.

All of the Panel members expressed their commitment to the work of the Panel, noting that it represents a critical opportunity to do something extraordinary and thereby contribute to globally significant and lasting good.

Agenda Item 3: Introduction of Secretariat

Co-Chair the Rt Hon Helen Clark introduced Anders Nordström, Head of the Secretariat, to the Independent Panel. He outlined the plans for the Secretariat to support the work of the Panel

and shared the structure of the Secretariat team including the role of Project Manager, three analysts, a lead editor, a communication lead, project officer and advisers of the Co-Chairs and coordinator of the Panel.

Agenda Item 4: Status of the COVID-19 pandemic

Dr. Raj Panjabi advisor to HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf presented a background paper summarizing the present state of the pandemic. He drew five key lessons:

1. this novel coronavirus is an explosive – but not an unpredictable – shock;
2. the virus casts a long shadow: it hasn't only devastated our immune systems – it has devastated our health, economic, and social systems;
3. new tools can slow the virus and save lives, but there is no 'magic bullet';
4. some countries have dealt with the virus well and we should be asking: what can we learn from these outliers?;
5. the history of pandemics is repeating itself – we are leaving people behind again.

Agenda Item 5: Program of Work for the Panel

The Co-Chairs invited the Panel to consider a draft programme of work prepared by the Secretariat in relation, first, to the areas of work and questions of inquiry, and, second, to the methodologies, timelines, and communication.

Agenda item 5a. Programme of work: areas of work and questions of inquiry

The panel held a wide-ranging discussion of the areas of work and questions to be addressed.

Panel members agreed that the scope of the Panel's inquiry needs to encompass the actions of global institutions, and in particular WHO, and also the actions of states in the way they addressed their obligations under the International Health Regulations. There was discussion of the lessons to be learnt from different national responses, including from those countries that mounted a very early response and those whose full-scale response came later. The prior learnings of countries in earlier pandemics, and in particular the experience of the SARS response, was felt to be particularly salient, with key questions to be asked as to how some countries were able to maintain preparedness in the fifteen-year interval between the end of the SARS pandemic and that of COVID-19.

The Panel agreed that it will need to closely examine institutional responses to COVID 19, especially that of WHO, but also other elements of the multilateral system. It was suggested that the 'value proposal' of WHO was not equally evident to all states across the world nor to all stakeholders, and close attention needed to be paid to actions of WHO at all levels of the institution. The Panel was of the view that it should consider not only WHO as it is currently

mandated, but also the ways in which the international institutional architecture as a whole can best serve pandemic preparedness and response.

There was agreement that the Panel should seek to establish a detailed and authoritative chronology of COVID-19 events and responses to date, informed by carefully collected information from all sources. It was noted that a careful compilation of scientific and validated information on the response would serve to support a key outcome of the Panel's work, namely pointing to ways to restore broken trust in capacities to protect people.

The meeting agreed that care needed to be taken to ensure that a full range of opinions and stakeholders were included in the Panel's work, and that this included engaging with and hearing the voices of youth and of those who are digitally disconnected. The need to address the neglect of informal sectors and their insights into both the impact of the pandemic and their resilience to it was noted. Panel members expressed the view that the orientation of its work should be towards reinforcing a people-centred response. It was noted that responses to pandemics need to encompass issues of human rights, dignity, and agency, and not be limited by a narrow view of basic needs.

Panel members agreed that the Panel should work towards crafting recommendations which are both bold and practical.

Agenda item 5b. Programme of Work: methodologies, timelines and communication

The meeting considered the methods of work which the Independent Panel will undertake. It was agreed that these will include desk research, including from literature reviews and internal documents; expert hearings; commissioning papers on key topics; compiling case studies; in-depth interviews; and open hearings and consultations, including through web surveys. A number of Panel members expressed their willingness to assist in convening thematic and expert hearings and/or discussions on particular areas. It was agreed that modalities for providing support to Panel members in conducting their work on the panel will be explored.

Panel members were in strong agreement that their work should be undertaken with rigour and impartiality. It was also agreed that regular and transparent communication to stakeholders, including Member States, will be an important part of the work of the Independent Panel.

The Co-Chairs noted that the Panel will ensure learning from existing review committees is drawn upon in the work of the Panel, including from the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, the International Health Regulations Review Committee, and the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee.

Summary Action Points

The Panel agreed that the Programme of Work will be organized around three main themes of enquiry:

1. an analysis and vision for a strengthened international system ideally equipped for pandemic preparedness and response;
2. a review of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic from the initial phase through to the present, including the global alerts, the spread, country responses, and wide societal impact; and
3. lessons to be learnt in why SARS-CoV-2 spread globally and had its devastating impact, including an understanding of characteristics of the virus and of system, governmental and institutional responses at all levels.

The meeting agreed that The Independent Panel would meet every 6 weeks and present updates to the resumed session of the 73rd World Health Assembly scheduled for November 2020 and World Health Organization Executive Board in January 2021, and then report to the 74th World Health Assembly scheduled for May 2021.

Agenda Item 6: Concluding remarks and next steps

The meeting concluded with summary statements by the Co-Chairs. The Rt Hon Helen Clark observed that the recommendations of The Independent Panel must be evidence-based, practical and implementable in short order, and people-centred, with recommendations that will make a real difference to global health security. HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said that she was moved by the commitment of all of the Panel members to the task before the Panel and expressed the hope that the work of the Panel leads to bold, credible, robust, and implementable solutions that ensure our world is better prepared for the next pandemic.

It was agreed that next steps would include finalisation of the detailed calendar of the work of the Panel, a press statement in relation to the conclusions of the first meeting, and the programme of work.

Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome remarks by co-chairs
2. Introduction by and of Panel members
3. Introduction of Secretariat
4. Status of the COVID-19 pandemic
5. Panel Terms of Reference
6. Program of Work for the Panel
 - a. Areas of work and questions of inquiry
 - b. Methodologies, timelines and communication
7. Concluding remarks and next steps

List of Attendees

Co-Chairs

Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,
The Right Honorable Helen Clark

Panel Members

Dr Mauricio Cárdenas
Aya Chebbi
The Honorable Mark Dybul, MD
Professor Michel Kazatchkine
Dr. Joanne Liu
Precious Matsoso
The Rt Hon David Miliband
Thoraya Obaid
Ms. Preeti Sudan
Professor Ernesto Zedillo
Professor Zhong Nanshan

Secretariat to the Independent Panel

Anders Nordström
Helena Legido-Quigley
Christine McNab
Celeste Canlas
Michael Bartos
Mathias Bonk

Advisors

Dr. Sudhvir Singh, advisor to Rt Hon. Helen Clark
Dr. Raj Panjabi, advisor to HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
George Kronnisanyon Werner Coordinator, Office of HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

