



## 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 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response  
9 February 2021

### *Remarks of The Right Honourable Helen Clark*

Welcome to all, to our fourth meeting.

Since the Panel last met, President Sirleaf and I have presented the interim report to the Executive Board. We would both like to thank you all and the Secretariat for your huge contributions to the Panel reaching that milestone.

The EB report made it clear that we are an independent Panel, unafraid of airing uncomfortable truths, and determined to help drive improvements in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. That also means that we have a duty to continue to issue carefully thought through positions which are based on evidence.

We must also recognize the hard work and sacrifices of people and organisations around the world as we all continue to confront this unprecedented crisis. The Panel is tasked with learning from the past and proposing advances for the future. That in no way diminishes our respect for those dedicated to this fight and who are risking their own health and even their lives right now. Our admiration and concern for those who put themselves at risk to help others inspires our efforts.

Much of the analysis and investigation phase of our work is well advanced, and we will very soon need to discuss potential recommendations. It is important that Panel members identify specific areas needing further review so that the Secretariat can focus its efforts.

We also have to be mindful that the pandemic is continuing its twists and turns and will likely have more surprises in store. Right now, the spread of variants is top of mind - and it is the vast number of cases around the world which has allowed them to emerge.

So, the urgent counsel we offered in the interim report on stemming transmission through public health measures is just as valid today as it was at the beginning of this year. Countries

and citizens must use all possible means to try to stop the spread, protect health, save lives, and preserve fraying health systems.

This call is coming directly from the frontlines. Earlier this month at one of our town hall events, we heard from people, working to secure Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in fragile settings. We heard about interrupted supply chains, closed facilities, and diverted health staff and resources.

The pandemic has made this already challenging area of SRHR even more challenging. This reminds us too of the importance of service continuity planning as part of pandemic preparedness. Later this week, we'll hear from midwives in a town hall dialogue, and, as with all who have helped us in our work, we appreciate their willingness to share experiences and ideas candidly.

I will now handover to President Sirleaf.

*Remarks of Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*

Thank you, Prime Minister Clark.

Good afternoon from Monrovia. As Prime Minister Clark stated, the messages from our interim report were well received. One that I would like to underscore again is the serious gaps we're witnessing daily in vaccination coverage. To date, according to Bloomberg, more than 134 million shots have been given globally. Sub-Saharan Africa is being left behind as rich nations stockpile vaccines.

Current global health priorities do not equitably embrace those most in need, including people who are living with noncommunicable diseases. To ward against the emergence of new variants now threatening many countries, we need to prioritise measures to stop the spread everywhere now. The pandemic is a global public health problem. The solutions must be accessible to all people, regardless of socio-economic status. Vaccination is a key tool for this, and it is not yet meaningfully available to people in the poorest countries.

The evidence is crystal clear from the work of the Secretariat--this pandemic impacts communities differently. So, yes, race matters as does socio-economic status. Frontline workers are daily in harm's way yet not receiving the consideration they deserve. Let me, therefore, repeat what has been said before--vaccine nationalism is short-sighted and is not following the science of the virus. The rapid spread of variants across multiple geographies definitively proves that ending this pandemic requires global vaccination. We are all in this

together as one planet, one community, Ubuntu. What happens to one, poor or rich, strong or weak, happens to all.

Turning to our agenda, there has been significant progress on all aspects of the Program of Work. This has been made possible by intense work supported by the Secretariat and very active involvement by Panel members. Thank you. But while our progress is commendable, we are not yet done.

As we think ahead to our report for May, we need to plan not only what it says, but also how to ensure it has maximum impact. We have all taken on board the lessons of previous panels, reviews, and recommendations that have yet to be implemented.

Therefore, we are making concerted effort for broad-based additional consultations as an added element to our Program of Work. Led by us, the Secretariat will help reinforce the Panel's outreach and engagement with key geopolitical and other leaders between now and May.

Our Agenda for the next two days will shed more light on work performed in the areas of the international system, the role and performance of WHO, communications and communities, and essential supplies such as vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics.

We will also assess overall progress in the areas of building on the past, reviewing the present, and the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. In all, we look forward, as always, to your candid, thoughtful and substantive discussions and how these might inform key recommendations in our May report.

**END**