



# Meeting Report

Fourth Meeting of the Panel  
9 - 10 February 2021



## Report Summary

The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response met virtually for its fourth meeting on February 9 and 10, 2021.

In opening the meeting Panel Co-Chair, the Rt Hon Helen Clark underscored the imperative of maintaining proven public health measures against COVID-19, particularly as new variants emerge. Co-Chair Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf warned that the continued spread of COVID-19 is impacting communities differently across regions, ethnicities, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors, with frontline workers daily in harm's way and often without the support they need.

The Co-Chairs noted that the Panel is well advanced in its investigation and analysis and will soon begin to formulate recommendations aimed at ensuring that the world is better prepared for future global health threats.

The meeting continued the Panel's discussion of the international system, addressing what an 'ideal' system for pandemic preparedness and response might look like, the functions required of it, and the gaps existing in it today. Panel members reviewed the World Health Organization's (WHO) role and performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, and issues concerning its mandate and functions, organizational capacity, governance and financing, and the Director-General's authority.

The Panel also considered analyses of the severe health impact of the pandemic on health workers and on people who are marginalised and vulnerable, including elderly populations. It noted that the pandemic has led to essential health service disruptions in at least 90 per cent of countries that reported to the WHO. The shortages of essential supplies, particularly in the earlier stages of the pandemic, including of personal protective equipment, testing kits, oxygen and ventilators, have been of great concern. The Panel examined reasons for these shortages and discussed remedies to avoid these in future.

The Panel discussed current challenges, including the inequitable allocation and distribution of vaccines, and is examining aspects of the vaccine value-chain, including governance and co-ordination, research and development, manufacturing, procurement, allocation, and distribution.

The Independent Panel is scheduled to meet next on March 16-17, 2021. It will issue its report in May and present it to the 74th World Health Assembly which is scheduled to begin on 24 May 2021.

# Report

## Background

The Independent Panel was established by the Director-General of the World Health Organization pursuant to World Health Assembly Resolution WHA73.1. In July 2020 the Director-General requested the former Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Right Honorable Helen Clark, and the former President of Liberia, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, to be Co-Chairs of the Panel, for which they then selected 11 panelists. The first meeting of the Panel was held on 17 September 2020, the second meeting on 20 – 21 October 2021 and the third meeting on 16-17 December 2020. The Panel Co-Chairs presented the interim report of the Panel, the Second Report on Progress, to the meeting of the Executive Board of the World Health Organization on 19 January 2021 ([https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Independent-Panel\\_Second-Report-on-Progress\\_Final-15-Jan-2021.pdf](https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Independent-Panel_Second-Report-on-Progress_Final-15-Jan-2021.pdf)).

## Agenda Item 1: Welcome remarks by Co-Chairs

The Rt Hon Helen Clark opened the meeting noting that the Panel's interim report had been presented to the WHO Executive Board on 19 January and thanking Panel members as well as the Secretariat for their help in reaching this milestone. She noted the interim report showed the Panel's independence and determination to help drive improvements. She also noted the continuing admiration of and concern for those who are being exposed to risk in fighting the pandemic to help others. She noted that the Panel is coming towards the end of the analysis and investigation phase of its work, and would need to move soon towards considering recommendations.

In her opening remarks, HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf underscored the continuing gaps in vaccine coverage and that current global health priorities do not equitably embrace those most in need. She emphasized the evidence that the pandemic impacts communities differently, so that ethnicity matters as do socio-economic status and other factors, and that the rapid spread of variants across multiple geographies proves that ending the pandemic requires global vaccination and collective solidarity. In thinking ahead to the report for May, she noted the Panel will need to plan not only what it says, but also how to ensure that it has maximum impact.

## Agenda Item 2: Report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panel meeting

The report of the third meeting of the Panel held on 16-17 December 2020 was acknowledged. It was noted that it is published on the Panel's website at [https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/TheIndependentPanel\\_3rdMeetingReport.pdf](https://theindependentpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/TheIndependentPanel_3rdMeetingReport.pdf).

## Agenda Item 3: The international system at large and WHO

The Panel received presentations from the Secretariat concerning the international system at large and focussing in particular on WHO as an institution, drawing on literature reviews, expert discussions, interviews and analysis, as well as on inputs from Panel members as the work was developed. In relation to the international system at large, the Panel considered a statement of principles as well as core functions that the international system should ideally perform in pandemic preparedness and response, as well as an initial analysis of gaps that have been revealed in this pandemic. An analysis of features of international treaties and conventions across a number of domains, including safety, environment, and security was presented. As well, the needs for financing mechanisms, in particular across preparedness and early response, were considered.

In relation to the WHO, the Panel considered analysis presented of the role WHO best plays in the international system at large, how the authority of the Director-General is exercised, how the organization is structured and its capacities to deliver across its mandate. The Panel considered information gathered by the Secretariat in addressing identified challenges in the financing and in reinforcing the governance of WHO.

The Panel held an extensive discussion concerning the role of the international system, including that of WHO, in pandemic preparedness and response. It agreed that it should focus its recommendations around specific and concrete proposals to rectify the gaps found in the performance of core functions in the system. Recognizing that one key issue is that the system failed to operate as a system, the Panel considered that that implied that efforts should be directed towards change that makes the system function, rather than creating a new one. Panel members also noted the need to ensure that states hold themselves accountable and not deflect responsibility to an abstract idea of an international system. There was agreement that the Panel should not endeavour to be comprehensive, but rather should focus its recommendations on areas where it will have greatest impact, recognising the gravity of the situation, and be distinctive. It was suggested that recommendations could be organized into those requiring immediate action, those whose achievement will be in the medium term, and those that will require sustained long-term commitment or be realised in the longer term. It was also agreed there is a need for the Panel's proposals to inform other initiatives in train, including, among others, the work of the G7 and G20. It was noted that non-state actors need to be included in the analysis and recommendations, including youth and marginalized groups, and that caution is needed in order to avoid the negative implications of securitizing health.

The Panel discussed the idea of thinking about “WHO-plus”, recognizing that the health sector acting alone does not have the power and influence to secure the necessary whole-of-society action, either in preparedness for or in response to a pandemic. The Panel considered background work conducted on financing and agreed that attention needs to be paid to a financing system that can create global public goods. The Panel also agreed to continue analysis and liaison with other actors on ways in which international law instruments can better serve pandemic preparedness and response.

## Summary of the day

In closing the first day's proceedings, the Rt Hon Helen Clark noted that the Panel had considered the gap analysis and the diagnosis and would now need to focus on the remedies and prescriptions, acknowledging that the pandemic has a way to run. She drew attention to the Panel's view that the coordination function itself is a key issue, and that as the impacts of pandemics transcend the health sphere, diverse actors, including finance ministers and heads of state, must be influenced. She also noted that the Panel's work programme now needs to integrate analysis and proposals concerning the international system, WHO, and national responses.

## Day 2

### Recap of the previous day

In recapping the previous day's work, HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf noted the discussion of the gap analysis, and that the Secretariat should now develop a coherent set of options for Panel recommendations. The consideration of 'WHO-plus' had focused on the need for an international system that aligns form, function, and finance, and, when international law considerations are added, formality. She also noted that the Panel's task is not to solve all problems, but to focus on the most impactful changes. She noted the Panel's discussion of the possibility of suggesting that Member States consider convening an extraordinary World Health Assembly on COVID-19 in the second half of the year. She drew attention to the comments from Panel members and a wide range of stakeholder groups engaged that the overwhelming issue is inequity, and to address this requires fundamental change in the international system and support for the building and strengthening of regional and national institutions and community organisations for overall development, including preparedness and response.

### Agenda Item 4: Program of work progress report

The Panel received an update from the Secretariat in relation to its program of work, including analysis of prior review panels and the recommendations they made, detailed compiling and checking of a chronology of early events in the pandemic, and commissioned analysis of the economic and social impacts of the pandemic. The Panel briefly discussed the update, noting that documentation of the severe impact of the pandemic is important.

### Agenda Item 5: Communication and communities

The Secretariat presented a report on the analysis and progress made in the program of work on communication and communities. A review of risk communication in previous outbreaks has been undertaken, social media impacts have been analysed, and evidence of community engagement in national responses has been reviewed. One focus has been the engagement of community health

workers in the response, and different models for that. The impact of information overload and the role of social media are critical issues, as is the impact of late, confusing, partisan, or conflicting messaging in undermining citizens' trust. It was noted that further analysis and expert consultations will be conducted.

The Panel discussed the report on communication and communities and noted the importance of the issues it covered. Impacts on mental health were highlighted, as well as community leadership in pandemic response. It was noted that the proximity of local health workers to communities is a potential asset in supporting health action at the local level.

## Agenda Item 6: Impact on health services, essential supplies, and vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics

The Panel considered a report from the Secretariat on three related issues: the impact of the pandemic on health services, the analysis of essential supplies and their availability, and an end-to-end analysis of the vaccines value chain.

In its discussion of these issues the Panel noted that the area, in particular in relation to vaccines, is continuing to change rapidly. Particular issues that were currently pertinent included securing allocation criteria in a way that is globally acceptable, and ways of overcoming production bottlenecks. The goal of having a system better pre-prepared for the acceleration of vaccine, therapeutic, and diagnostic responses was noted. There was discussion of the need to ensure that the vaccine eco-system is properly inclusive and fully reflects advances in vaccine development and roll-out wherever they occur. The Panel considered that mechanisms such as COVAX would only fully achieve their goals if they included all players. The Panel agreed that issues of intellectual property e.g. under the TRIPS system and its waivers, would need to be considered thoroughly. Another challenge that needs to be addressed is vaccine hesitancy, and sustainability issues in health supplies.

## Agenda item 7: Towards the May Report

The Panel briefly discussed the structure and intended goals of its May report, agreeing that the report presentation needs to include both recommendations with their call to action, and the evidence underlying the recommendations. The Panel reiterated their intention to ensure recommendations accompanied by clear specification of who should be responsible for their implementation.

The Panel also considered engagement strategies for their efforts, noting the range of stakeholders who need to be involved.

## Reflections on the meeting and concluding remarks

In final reflections, Co-Chair, the Rt Hon Helen Clark, noted that the Panel's May report must not be one of those reports that is heavy on diagnosis and light on prescription. It has to have implementable, actionable recommendations: vague exhortations on the need for more leadership and community engagement will not suffice.

In closing the meeting, Co-Chair HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf reflected that the Panel will need to issue in its report a strong statement to leaders of the world about the need for policy measures and collective action to address the pandemic now, and in an equitable manner for all nations. It should make bold recommendations on the requirements of the international system and be equally bold on the responsibilities of member states. She thanked Panel members for their very active participation in the meeting.



## Meeting agenda

### Tuesday 9 February

12.00 – 12.10	Welcome remarks by co-chairs
12.10 - 12.15	Report of the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Panel meeting
12.15 – 12.30	The International System at large
12.30 – 12.45	WHO
12.45 – 14.15	Bringing the two discussions together
14.15 – 14.30	Summary of the day

### Wednesday 10 February

12.00 – 12.10	Recap of Day 1
12.10 – 12.40	Programme of Work – Progress report <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Building on the past – theme 1</li><li>• Reviewing the present – theme 2</li><li>• The socio-economic impacts – theme 3</li></ul>
12.40 – 13.10	Communities and Communication
13.10 - 13.50	Impact on health services; essential supplies; vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics
13.50 - 14.20	Towards the May report Outreach and Engagement
14.20 - 14.30	Reflections on the meeting, conclusions and next Panel meeting



## List of Participants

### Co-Chairs

HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf  
Rt Hon. Helen Clark

### Panel Members

Mauricio Cárdenas  
Aya Chebbi  
Mark Dybul  
Michel Kazatchkine  
Joanne Liu  
Precious Matsoso  
David Miliband  
Thoraya Obaid  
Preeti Sudan  
Ernesto Zedillo,  
Zhong Nanshan

### Secretariat

Anders Nordström  
Salma Abdalla  
Michael Bartos  
Mathias Bonk  
Celeste Canlas  
Helena Legido-Quigley  
Shun Mabuchi  
Christine McNab  
Rosemary McCarney

### Advisors

Sudhvir Singh, Advisor to Rt Hon. Helen Clark  
George Kronnisanyon Werner, Advisor and Coordinator to HE Ellen Johnson Sirleaf