



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 6th Meeting of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response
14 April 2021

Remarks of Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Greetings to all of you.

We come together at a time when we can see some pockets of improvement in this pandemic. But also a time when much of the world is still consumed by COVID-19 and the terrible damage it is doing to people's health and wellbeing.

Vaccination coverage is steadily increasing. Some countries have managed to provide a dose to more than half of their populations. They are achieving their targets with vaccine currently available and their plans for expansion through local manufacturing. The better news is that as vaccination coverage rises, illness and death due to COVID-19 fall.

But there is still not enough vaccine in the world getting to the front-line workers who need it most. In Africa, less than one per cent of people in most countries have received one single dose. Despite efforts that we all appreciate, this is the grim and unjust reality. We will have much more to say about this in our main report in May.

And, we must also underscore that vaccines are not the only tool we have to control COVID-19.

People in many countries of all income brackets are still experiencing difficult and deadly increases in illness and death, driven often by the variants of concern. At this stage in the pandemic, this comes as a surprise – because by now we know how to control COVID-19, even without vaccines.

We know that physical distancing and masking will limit spread. We know that testing, contact tracing and isolation work. We have seen proof of this in several countries.

So the question is, why are we not taking advantage of public health measures to protect people's health? Why are we still losing more than 10,000 people every day to this pandemic? Why do we wait for ICUs to fill— again— before acting?

It's time for leaders to use the tools available to end illness and death knowing that every infection stopped today averts the risks of long-term damage from COVID, limits the opportunity for mutations to arise, and is one less burden in the way of vaccination scale-up.

Keeping our resolve is the only way to keep on top of the social and economic consequences as well. Children are in and out of school. Businesses are closed and, if they've survived, reopened only to be closed again. Serial, insufficiently managed lockdowns are keeping people on a rollercoaster.

It's time to be ambitious and end the illness and deaths caused by this pandemic.

The tragedy of COVID-19 underscores the importance of our work here today. We all look forward to our time together, as we work towards final recommendations that, if acted on, can stop this pandemic, and prevent another one from happening.

With that, I now turn over to Prime Minister Clark.

Remarks of The Right Honourable Helen Clark

Thank you, President Sirleaf, and greetings to each of you.

In the time we've worked together, we have identified some critical gaps in the response to COVID-19. Unfortunately, despite some countries managing to contain the virus, WHO is currently reporting an acceleration in both cases and deaths worldwide. It is clear what public health measures work to reduce transmission; yet too often we are not seeing evidence-based measures being put in place. Frankly we all have pandemic fatigue – but now is the time to increase resolve to curb transmission, and not to weaken it.

In our interim report in January, we highlighted some of the failures that allowed this outbreak to become a pandemic: such as that there was precious time lost in getting to the point of declaring a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and then when it was made, too few countries acted with alacrity. Guidance on what to do wasn't always clear. There were inadequate and stocks of life-saving supplies, and they were not equitably distributed.

In the last months we have gathered more evidence about what happened and made our analysis more precise. We were asked to review what happened, and we have. On the basis of that we can recommend ways forward to stop such an event happening again. Our task now is to make sure that those recommendations are compelling to all constituencies looking to the Panel to propose lasting and effective solutions.

According to the timetable we set ourselves, in just four weeks we are due to release our report. All along, we have promised actionable recommendations. Let us now get to work and fine-tune these, including those relevant to curbing the current pandemic.

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