

H.E. Mario Draghi
Prime Minister of Italy
Rome, Italy

H.E. Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Brussels, Belgium

20 May 2021

Dear Prime Minister Draghi,
Dear President von der Leyen,

Overtime, many have warned of our global vulnerability in the face of potential pandemics, particularly those caused by an airborne pathogen. As we become increasingly and painfully aware of the extent of the health, social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, our community of nations is once again recognising the need for a more robust global health system.

On the occasion of the upcoming *Global Health Summit*, convened by Italy, as 2021 G20 chair and the European Commission, we call on you to spare no effort to support strengthening the capacity of global public health institutions rapidly to protect us all.

Existing global public health instruments and institutions need to be significantly bolstered through incentives and mechanisms to ensure timely co-operation, transparency, accountability, and above all, compliance by all States. New rules and mechanisms are urgently needed to strengthen countries' capacities to prepare, prevent, and respond effectively to public health emergencies wherever and whenever they occur, in order to avoid another devastating pandemic like COVID-19.

With over three million people dead and billions more affected by the social, economic, and health-related consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the time has come for the world to elevate global health to the same standing and level of multilateral co-operation as applies to nuclear arms control, international trade, and climate change.

The International Health Regulations (IHR), the existing framework for reporting and responding to international health emergencies, lack essential compliance mechanisms and need to be strengthened overall for more effective global health governance as recommended by the recent *Lancet Public Health* article on [A Global Public Health Convention for the 21st Century](#). The IHR could also be supported by an overarching pandemic framework convention which would fill gaps in the exiting legal system and clarify relationships between States and international organisations.

The aftermath of regional outbreaks such as SARS in East Asia, Ebola in West and Central Africa, and Zika in Latin America generated a flurry of activity by the United Nations, civil society, academia, and concerned decision makers. The interest and political will to see their far-reaching change implemented, however, waned as localized outbreaks subsided.

Now, well over a year into the worst pandemic in more than a century, the world has paid dearly for failing to act on past recommendations intended to prevent catastrophes like COVID-19. With its devastating effects on health, wellbeing, and the economy, this pandemic has once more brought to the fore the urgent need for a paradigm shift in the global public health architecture.

The success or failure of international treaties and conventions is typically determined by the degree of observance demanded from signatories. It is, therefore, imperative for global public health instruments to have a compelling set of incentives and deterrents to promote the broad-based compliance needed to generate trust among countries.

These instruments require governments to embrace transparency as an indispensable tenet of global health security and cooperation. Governments must provide accurate, regular, and timely data on all infectious diseases and promptly declare outbreaks whenever they occur. There need to be provisions that ensure independent validation of epidemiological data and monitoring of compliance with agreed prevention, preparedness, detection, assessment, and response measures in a highly coordinated fashion.

The responsibility for assessment and validation of the outbreak of a disease with pandemic potential and for technical guidance to countries should rest with the World Health Organization (WHO). A new convention could spell out how compliance with and implementation of international requirements are monitored.

Countries must be persuaded to come into compliance through a set of incentives, with low- and middle-income countries receiving technical and financial support to meet these requirements. There must also be secure, adequate and sustainable financing for all global bodies designated to engage in pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response.

By assenting stronger international norms, nations can attain a higher degree of public health resilience within their own borders and among their neighbors, ensuring that they will be much better prepared to handle future outbreaks and pandemics.

Global public health instruments must be strong enough to protect the health of all people around the world. In March, [25 world leaders](#) joined forces to call on all nations on agreeing on a new international treaty for pandemic preparedness and response. This would be renewed, collective commitment undertaken at the highest political level, building on the constitution of the WHO and underpinned by existing global health instruments, especially the IHR.

The recently launched report of the *Independent Panel on Pandemic, Prevention, Preparedness and Response* concluded that the current system is not fit for purpose – it could not protect people from COVID-19, nor is it capable of preventing another novel and highly infectious pathogen from developing into a pandemic. The report calls for bold and forward-looking reforms, and for the engagement of heads of state and government in transforming the existing system. It recommends redesigning the surveillance and alert system so that it offers full transparency and providing the WHO with the authority to publish information


on outbreaks with pandemic potential without having to seek approval, and to send experts to investigate at the shortest possible notice. The Independent Panel and the *Panel for a Global Public Health Convention* both advocate a new global pandemic treaty to ensure timely co-operation, transparency, accountability, and, above all, compliance to avert and prepare for future pandemics.

Having witnessed the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on all facets of life, we have a moral and humanitarian obligation to ensure that the global public health architecture is reformed so that it can effectively prevent, prepare for, and respond to infectious disease outbreaks and other public health emergencies. As the world grapples with yet another global health crisis, we urge the European Commission and the G20 leadership to pursue substantive and actionable change. The time to act is now.

Sincerely,



Danilo Türk
President
Club de Madrid



Dame Barbara Stocking
Chair
Panel for a Global Public Health Convention