WITHOLDING FUNDING FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION IS A DEATH SENTENCE

President Trump’s decision to halt funding for the World Health Organization (WHO) in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic is deeply irresponsible and dangerous. This act will profoundly weaken the vital responses needed to address the spread of COVID-19 that is threatening the health and economic security of every nation, including the United States. Pandemics know no borders and the response to address them must include both national and international efforts. The WHO is the only multilateral, international, health agency with a mandate to address a global public health emergency.

Cutting funding to the WHO will eviscerate its capacity to address the current pandemic and the many other public health challenges the world faces. Viral transmission will increase and low-income countries that already have weak healthcare systems, vulnerable populations, and very limited capacity to care for the critically ill will be particularly hard-hit. To put it bluntly, cutting the WHO’s funding will kill people.

Rather than eliminating its financial support the United States should increase financing for the WHO to strengthen what it is already doing to coordinate the response across regions, mitigate risks, improve country preparedness and responses, and accelerate research and development. This includes contributing to an Emergency Fund to assist low-income nations during this crisis.

As of April 7, the WHO has shipped critical, personal protective equipment to 133 countries, provided over 40 technical documents that combat misinformation and strengthen capacity, developed multilingual, online courses for COVID-19, and has launched vital international research trials and find effective treatments for COVID-19.

“A weak health system anywhere is a weak health system everywhere,” as Dr. Tom Frieden, the former director of the CDC, used to say. The WHO is the only agency with the mandate to work with countries to address a pandemic. This is the time to support the organization, not undermine it.

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