

In defence of WHO

It's very easy to take a pop at the [World Health Organization](#). We do it ourselves - the overheads, the salaries, the business class travel (the fact that as a UN organisation their official language is UK English, but there's a 'z' in their name!). But most of that is anecdotal, old news or just sour grapes. The truth is, it is too easy to sling mud, and we work with amazing people across the WHO, at HQ and in-country, where we find dedicated, professional and passionate advocates for public health. You just need to know where to look.

It's not all rosy, of course, we observe huge problems with the increased reliance on private sector funding, or philanthropic organisations that represent the globalised status quo and we are increasingly troubled by the shrinking (our) civil society space. But most of all we are frustrated that this unique institution that has the potential to deliver so much, is weakened, undermined and destabilised by the very people who it serves - its Member States.

In times of relative calm, the WHO is starved of core funding and has to rely on donations from both governments and foundations that come with all the strings you might expect. The donor sets the global agenda in health. In times of trouble - or even emergency, such as we now face in [COVID-19](#) - WHO is an all too convenient scapegoat for government inadequacy. It is true, with the benefit of hindsight, at the very beginning of the outbreak, WHO were slow to call it, and effusive in their praise of the Chinese administration, but you can only base opinion on what you know. As Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte commented: we make 100% of the decisions with 50% of the information.

Take for example, the Trump administration's [latest attack](#), or more correctly that of Donald Trump himself, who on Tuesday announced a freeze on payments to WHO. A thinly veiled attempt to deflect attention from his own woeful response to the pandemic. This comes at the very moment we need WHO leadership the most. This shameful pronouncement by Trump has been beautifully unpacked by many, which are listed below, and I will not repeat here.

More important is to realise that WHO is not the 'global health police' many people think it is and some would like it to be, perhaps. The foundation for WHO's work when it comes to pandemics are six-fold.

1. Provide leadership on matters critical to health and engaging in partnerships with joint action is needed
2. Shape the research agenda and stimulate the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge
3. Set norms and standards and promote and monitor their implementation
4. Articulate ethical and evidence-based policy options
5. Provide technical support to catalyse change and build sustainable institutional

capacity

6. Monitor the situation and assess health trends

So, nowhere does it say the World Health Organization will tell countries what to do, and for Trump or anyone else to claim otherwise is without merit. It is simply not their job to 'manage' health. That is the responsibility of the Members States themselves. Instead they provide leadership - WHO in general, and Tedros in particular, are doing just that. Undermining them, threatening further cuts in budget, and blaming them for an unforeseen event is not only unhelpful but wickedly cynical and, if left unchallenged, will cost lives across the world.

Organisations who have unpacked US President Donald Trump's withdrawal of funding for WHO:

[The WHO v coronavirus: why it can't handle the pandemic, The Guardian](#)

[The World Health Organisation and Pandemic Politics: A reply to David Fidler, Andrew Wharmer](#)

[L'OMS dans le maelstrom du covid-19, La Vie des Idees](#)

[The World Health Organization and Pandemic Politics, Think Global Health](#)

[Trump Slammed the W.H.O. Over Coronavirus. He's Not Alone., The New York Times](#)

[Why Taiwan has become a problem for WHO, BBC](#)

[Coronavirus: Is Africa ready?, BBC](#)

[United we will be saved: Global leadership is needed to push pharma solutions and distribute them at affordable prices, The Times of India](#)