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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 4, 2020

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organization
20 Avenue Appia
CH-1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland

Dear Dr. Tedros:

We write to express our support for the World Health Organization and its efforts to respond to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. As the primary international organization responding to global health challenges, the WHO's work around the world has been invaluable in slowing the spread of COVID-19. While there are valid criticisms and questions about the WHO's response to the rapidly evolving pandemic—just as there are valid criticisms and questions about how many national governments have responded—there is no question that without the WHO's efforts, this crisis would be infinitely worse. As the past few months have showed more than ever, the safety and security of Americans is directly linked with the health and well-being of people all over the world.

Throughout its long and enduring partnership with the United States, the WHO has helped make great strides: eradicating smallpox, significantly decreasing polio cases, and successfully responding to SARS and MERS. The WHO effectively serves as a force multiplier for U.S. efforts. As a USAID implementing partner, the WHO often works in dangerous settings where few other organizations are willing to serve. In March 2019, for example, the WHO was the only international organization to stay in Katwa and Butembo after two Ebola treatment centers were fire-bombed in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In short, the organization is indispensable.

As the United States considers policy changes to mitigate the impact of future waves of COVID-19 in our own country, we must utilize our role in the WHO to garner best practices of other countries and share information that will promote overall health and well-being of people across the world. There are serious concerns that the WHO did not pressure China for more transparency in the early days of the outbreak and did not appropriately alert the world about the nature of the pandemic in a timely manner. We would like to translate these concerns into understanding how the WHO operates under its current guiding principles and binding governance mechanisms, including the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR), that have been agreed upon by its member states. Specifically, we would like to understand the detailed steps the WHO took to obtain, verify, and share information about COVID-19 from the Chinese government.

We strongly feel, however, that these concerns do not justify President Trump’s shortsighted declaration that he will terminate the United States’ relationship with the WHO in the midst of a pandemic.

We are deeply concerned that this decision will negatively impact the WHO’s efforts to lead a global response to COVID-19, in addition to other global health priorities and progress now jeopardized by the pandemic. To that end, we welcome your insight on how an absence of U.S. support for the WHO will impact its work around the globe. We ask that you provide complete responses to the following questions as we work to craft the U.S. response to COVID-19 and assess a path forward for constructive U.S. engagement with the WHO.

1. When and how did the WHO first learn that there were a cluster of pneumonia cases of an unknown cause in Wuhan? When and under what criteria did the WHO determine sufficient evidence existed of human-to-human transmission of the virus?
2. What steps did you take to encourage the Chinese government to abide by their obligations under the International Health Regulations (Articles 6 and 7) to provide truthful information?
3. What resources do you have at your disposal to encourage governments to abide by their obligations under the International Health Regulations to provide truthful and timely information?
4. Please explain your praise of the Chinese government, including China’s “commitment to transparency” and the “extraordinary measures it has taken to contain the outbreak.” Do you still agree with that assessment of China’s response?¹
5. Can you describe the divergent approaches of the Chinese government in response to this pandemic versus the SARS outbreak in 2002?
6. How many field visits to China has the WHO made from October 1, 2019 to the present? Did any U.S. officials or citizens accompany the WHO on these trips? If so, whom, and on which trips? How does the WHO conduct field visits to any country during similar serious disease outbreaks? Are U.S. representatives typically involved in these visits?
7. What was the nature, frequency and channel of the WHO’s communications with Taiwan in the early stages of the outbreak, as well as over the ensuing months?
8. When did you first communicate with U.S. government officials, including but not limited to the U.S. State Department, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, U.S. Mission to International Organizations in Geneva, the White House, National Security Council, or other Trump Administration officials, about the suspected or confirmed outbreak in Wuhan? What was the frequency of those communications? What steps did you take to encourage the United States government to abide by their obligations under the International Health Regulations to inform of public health risks outside their respective territories that may spread disease internationally?
9. During the critical month of February, your organization was able to ship over 1.4 million diagnostic tests to laboratories around the world, while the United States distributed fewer than 4,000. Did any U.S. State Department, CDC, or HHS official contact you or

¹ Tedros Statement, Jan. 30, 2020, [https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-statement-on-ihr-emergency-committee-on-novel-coronavirus-\(2019-ncov\)](https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-statement-on-ihr-emergency-committee-on-novel-coronavirus-(2019-ncov)).

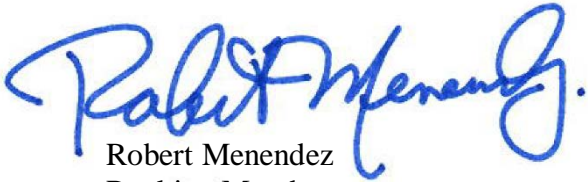
anyone on your response team inquiring about this diagnostic test or the methods by which you came to support that test?

10. How important is U.S. financial and political support to the WHO's response to COVID-19 and other global health efforts? Please provide any analysis the WHO has conducted on the impact of the suspension of U.S. funding to the WHO, including the impact on COVID-19 related activities, the impact on the "Solidarity" Trial, vaccine development, as well as other global health priorities.
11. What reforms have you undertaken since becoming the Director-General? Have there been any considerations about strengthening the IHR's and the position of the Director-General? Is the WHO currently considering any structural or policy reforms?

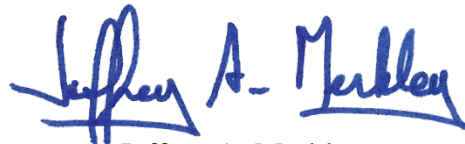
We applaud the WHO's continuing work to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and promote public health around the world. We believe in a productive relationship between the United States and the WHO and hope you will help us in our continued efforts to bolster the global response to this pandemic as well as future outbreaks.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Ranking Member



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator