

World Health Organization

CIMUN

Topic 3: Establishing a universal code of conduct for behavior in the case of an
epidemic/pandemic

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Introduction

Within the 21st century, there have been a number of outbreaks, with some old diseases such as Cholera and the Bubonic Plague, and several new ones such as SARS, Ebola, Zika and COVID-19. ¹ For a number of these outbreaks, resolutions have been passed to decide how member states should deal with the specific disease, often in the Security Council. However, establishing a universal code of conduct for behaviour is important in ensuring pandemic preparedness and may also have the side effect of reducing the politics that can be associated with choices made in the case of a pandemic.

Definition of Key Terms

Epidemic: a disease affecting or tending to affect a disproportionately large number of individuals within a population, community, or region at the same time. ²

Pandemic: a disease occurring over a wide geographic area and affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population. A Pandemic is a more widespread epidemic.

PPE: Personal protective equipment is used to protect the wearer from illnesses. The equipment may include Protective clothing, gloves, face coverings such as masks and is often used by healthcare workers and/or those who are regularly in close contact to those who are ill.

Unemployment: The number of people who are unable to find jobs but are looking for one.

Background Information

As the world grows to become more globalised, the risk of global outbreaks has increased. This is due to the increased interactions between countries through tourism and business which makes it easier for diseases to be spread to several countries in a short span of time. Pandemics often come with an aftermath of social and economic problems, such as increased unemployment and social unrest; many member states came to realise this, which resulted in the creation of the International Health Regulations (IHR). This was, at the time, the only international legal framework which detailed how infectious diseases should be dealt with by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the member states. It has since undergone a few revisions, with some of the amendments even being adopted as a resolution.

To keep with the IHR, 195 of the member state signatories worked towards building the core capacities necessary to reduce the risk of the spread of a pandemic by a set deadline of 1 July 2012, however, 110 of the member states were unable to accomplish this, and therefore requested a two year

¹ "Managing Epidemics," World Health Organization, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/managing-epidemics/en/>.

² "'Pandemic' Vs 'Epidemic'," Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-trusted Online Dictionary, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/epidemic-vs-pandemic-difference>.

extension in 2013. What is likely to be a factor in this delay is due to many countries having fragmented, understaffed and/or underfunded health programs.³

Asides from the IHR, the UN has worked towards the prevention of disease outbreak through the Millenium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Arguably the largest contributing factors to the spread of a disease that results in a pandemic are tourism, water supply, climate and food.

An unsafe food and water supply can result in the spread of communicable diseases such as cholera and swine flu, both of which have had instances of an epidemic; 3-5 million people are infected with Cholera a year due to a lack of a safe water supply⁴, and the swine flu caused a pandemic in 2009, causing an estimated 284,000 deaths.⁵

Without the proper infrastructure, climate can also result in the contamination of food and water supply. In a scenario in which heavy flooding has occurred, sewages can overflow and result in a widespread contamination of water which may later result in the contamination of food supplies.

Tourism can also play a role in the spread of communicable diseases. Different regions of the world have different diseases that are more prevalent in that particular country than in other countries. This can result in a situation where a traveller might carry a foreign disease to the country that they are travelling to. This may result in locals becoming infected with the disease and the local healthcare system not being able to treat it due to a lack of experience/ resources for that particular disease. The opposite can also happen; in which the traveller gets infected with a disease in the country of travel and carries the disease over to their home country when returning which can result in a similar situation as the former situation.

Major Organizations Involved

China

Being one of the largest pharmaceutical producers in the world, China is a key player in the provision of pharmaceutical ingredients and vaccinations. In previous instances of an epidemic, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, China has proved to be a support to other countries such as Italy, by providing aid in the form of sending equipment and specialists. There have been previous beliefs that in the case of a pandemic, China would stockpile essential pharmaceutical ingredients and medications, however China has yet to act in such a way.

³ United Nations, "National Security and Pandemics," United Nations, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/national-security-and-pandemics>.

⁴ "Weekly epidemiological record," WHO | World Health Organization, last modified March 26, 2010, <https://www.who.int/wer/2010/wer8513.pdf>.

⁵ "CDC Estimate of Global H1N1 Pandemic Deaths: 284,000," CIDRAP, last modified 2012, <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/news-perspective/2012/06/cdc-estimate-global-h1n1-pandemic-deaths-284000>.

United States of America (USA)

Home to several of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies, the United States of America has the potential to be a key player when it comes to times of a pandemic due to their capacity to research and develop medicine and vaccines to tackle pandemics. However, the USA is scheduled to soon leave the World Health Organisation, which may result in reduced cooperation between the USA and the WHO. The USA has also shown cases in which it has taken actions to ensure the safety of their own citizens such as buying out the world's supplies of a COVID-19 drug, ramdesivir.⁶

World Health Organization (WHO)

The WHO works with member states to release data and statistics as well as provide necessary supplies such as PPE and biomedical equipment to areas of the pandemic during times of a pandemic. They also work to combat misinformation on social media platforms which helps reduce panic and aids in ensuring the public knows what they can do to combat the situation. They are also currently running a COVID-19 solidarity Response Fund.⁷

International Labour Organization

The ILO looks to combat unemployment and support workers which during a pandemic is more highly needed. They provide analysis on labour markets during times of a pandemic and help illustrate scenarios of what may happen in the near future. They have moved to work with other entities such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to tackle these issues in more depth depending on the region.⁸ They have held workshops and released prints on ensuring worker safety during times of a pandemic. An example of such can be found [here](#).

Relevant UN Resolutions and Documents

[2017 revision of Global Health and Foreign Policy](#)

Discusses actions that member states should take towards improving overall healthcare. Areas that might want to be looked at particularly are operative clauses 5, 10, 20.

[International Health Regulations](#). (2005)

⁶ Sarah Boseley, "US Secures World Stock of Key Covid-19 Drug Remdesivir," The Guardian, last modified July 1, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/30/us-buys-up-world-stock-of-key-covid-19-drug>.

⁷ "COVID-19 Response Fund," WHO | World Health Organization, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/donate>.

⁸ "ILO and EBRD Joining Forces in Face of Coronavirus Pandemic," European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2020/ilo-and-ebrd-joining-forces-in-face-of-coronavirus-pandemic.html>.

It is not a resolution but is a framework that details what actions should be taken during unusual health incidents. Part 5 (pg 20), Article 7 (pg 19) Article 32 (pg 24) are sections that may want to be looked at closer.

[Resolution on the Ebola epidemic.](#)

Resolution made by the Security Council that details approaches made towards the EBOLA epidemic. Clauses 1, 15, 16 and 4 are sections that may aid delegates when coming up with solutions of their own.

Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

As mentioned earlier, signatories to the IHR have worked towards building core capacities to deal with situations such as a pandemic.

In addition to this, many countries have also established a pandemic/epidemic framework detailing how to address pandemics depending on the severity of it. These frameworks establish stages of severity with recommendations of what actions should be taken. Below are some examples of actions that might be recommended.

One action that has been taken is the closing of national borders during more extreme times of the current pandemic. This is an effective method of preventing travelled cases and as such, prevents the spread of the virus in the country and has been a measure used by several countries such as Australia and Denmark. However, this is a move which may have a negative impact on the country's economy, especially if the economy is highly reliant on tourism. With borders closed, tourism sectors will suffer, which may result in increased unemployment. This is also a measure that may also come at a political cost; some countries may have differing views on the pandemic which can result in disagreements on the border closing. This is likely to affect countries in which people in neighbouring countries may work in the country, and can result in them being unable to go to work. Examples of this are Denmark and Sweden as well as Singapore and Malaysia.

Another measure that has been taken currently or previously during times of a pandemic is the shutting down of the entire or sectors of the country with the exception of necessary workers. This is an action that is likely recommended in more severe cases. This has been used with great effect in New Zealand, who took swift action in shutting down, as well as Denmark. While this is an effective method of reducing the spread of a disease, especially in the cases of it being highly contagious, it comes with many social, political and economic issues. Shutting down sectors of the country results in firms not making as much money and therefore downsizing. This results in an increase in unemployment and reduction in overall consumption patterns. It makes this measure unpopular to the public, especially for extended periods of time. In some countries, such as the United States of America, the closing of the economy has resulted in

protests in the form of road blocking and/or protests outside of significant buildings. Some business owners have taken to disregarding regulations and have remained open during these times.

Possible Solutions

The creation of a universal framework of how a country should act in times of a pandemic is important in battling pandemics as the effect of a pandemic is often wide spread. Some areas that this could cover are mentioned below.

Having the government be more transparent with information concerning ongoing epidemics may prove to be useful. This helps in combating misinformation and/or overall denial of the situation at hand. Providing information to the public on how best to protect themselves may also help with reducing rate of infection as well as reassure them. In these scenarios, it may be important to work closely with local medical centres and experts so as to ensure the proper information is being published.

Another aspect to cover is the creation and distribution of vaccinations and/or treatments. Something that should be clarified is what data should be shared amongst researchers in the creation of vaccinations and/or treatment. In most cases, sharing research data will likely speed up the process of research, as research will not have to be repeated. On the other hand, the search for the creation of a vaccination and/or treatment can very quickly devolve into a race which can quite easily become very political. In terms of the distribution of vaccinations, a solution in which most will benefit is if vaccinations are distributed to all at-risk workers first before anyone else. However, governments tend to choose to stockpile treatments and vaccinations for their own citizens. In the end, this dilemma may look like it boils down to choosing between one's country or aiding other affected countries.

An aspect that all countries should also consider are the economic issues pandemics create. One such issue is increased unemployment and the closing of small businesses. In these cases, governments may want to consider intervening in the economy through fiscal and/or monetary policies. Increasing unemployment benefits or subsidising labour have been measures implemented by most countries currently. An example of a scheme to protect small businesses is the United Kingdom's measure of subsidising restaurant meals in order to encourage the public to eat out more to support these businesses.

Another aspect that should be considered is a code of conduct for the larger population. This could include social distancing measures such as limiting the number of people in an enclosed space, the use of masks, or the banning of larger gatherings.

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Other Readings

https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_749398/lang--en/index.htm

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK54163/>

<https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>- Data on COVID-19

News Articles

[Coronavirus: US pushes direct payment plan as part of \\$1tn stimulus](#)

[Coronavirus: How Japan keeps COVID-19 under control](#)

[Eat out to help out: Coronavirus scheme offering UK diners 50% off begins](#)