



Position Statement on Support for WHO

Introduction

The actions of American President Donald Trump to withdraw support from the World Health Organization (WHO) is harmful for the health of the world's children. For almost 75 years, WHO has addressed the health challenges of people around the world. Since its founding in 1948, WHO has enjoyed support from American presidents from both parties with significant financial investment.

The WHO constitution starts with the insistence that, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Americans have recognized the importance of global efforts to promote health and limit the spread and harm of disease. In many ways WHO reflects traditional American values. Equity and opportunity for all, democratic governance, and human rights form a foundation that has guided almost a century of global economic growth, prosperity, and improvement in standards of living.

Worldwide health and economic progress is now threatened by the undermining of support for WHO by the current American administration.

Importance of WHO

WHO plays a critical role in coordinating the global response to disease, including the current spread of COVID-19. This pandemic has presented enormous challenges on a scale not seen since the Influenza pandemic in 1917-18. Concerns as to possible errors in WHO's efforts to contain COVID-19 reflect the challenges faced by nations to address this virus. WHO has led efforts that successively contained outbreaks of SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome), Ebola and other serious contagious diseases.

With respect to children, under the leadership of WHO, and with American support and that of other countries worldwide, under 5 infant and child mortality dropped by almost half between 2000 and 2015. Polio has essentially been eradicated, lifesaving vaccines have been administered and child health scourges, such as malaria, have been diminished.

Children have the right to optimal health and development

The world community has established basic guarantees for the health and wellbeing of children through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC, which establishes the universal standards and norms for the treatment of children, has been ratified by all members of the United Nations except the United States. The CRC solidifies the foundation for a rights-based approach to children and represents a global ethical consensus accepted by governments throughout the world, and in the United States—by professional, non-governmental and municipal entities. Article 6 of the CRC calls for nation-states to ensure the optimal survival and development of children, and Article 24, access to health care and optimal health. WHO, through partnerships and health promotion programs, has documented success in guaranteeing these rights. US termination of support for WHO, without an alternative plan for child health promotion, is a rejection of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, that will have significantly negative consequences for children.

WHO and health related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) follow the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as the global framework for advancing the health and development of children and youth. WHO has played a critical role in achieving MDG advances, and will continue to do so in meeting the 2030 SDG targets for child health.

The morbidity and mortality suffered by Americans during COVID-19 has resulted in much of the world questioning the ability of America to keep its own citizens safe. Cooperation and collaboration on shared goals with international partners is a vital strategy for promoting health for all people—including Americans. Withdrawal of support for WHO by the United States, or other nation-states, undermines both global and American efforts to achieve the SDGs.

ISSOP Call to Action

President Trump's actions in threatening to defund WHO are clearly outside the acceptable behavior of all nation-states and is in contradiction to long held policies of support from the American government.

1. We call on President Trump, members of his administration and the US Congress to reverse their decision to abandon work with the global community on the health and wellbeing of children. Continuing President Trump's current course would violate children's rights to optimal survival and development and health, and contradict previous American support for achieving health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Any grievances, real or perceived, should be addressed in an appropriately responsible

fashion. We call on all global leaders to continue to support WHO in its efforts to improve children's health and development.

2. Failing responsible action from President Trump, we join with the editors of Lancet in asking that the American public replace President Trump with a more capable leader.
3. We call on businesses, philanthropy and other American institutions to continue support for SDGs related to health as a core part of their strategies.
4. WHO has enjoyed support from local governments. American municipalities should continue their leadership in addressing global issues and support WHO efforts and goals through local action.
5. Universities in America and elsewhere have been at the frontline with WHO since its inception and should continue their work that advances the rights of children.
6. Child health providers globally should educate themselves as to the needs of children, strategies to improve their health and developmental trajectory, and the efforts currently underway by UN affiliated organizations and others to advocate for ongoing support.

The COVID-19 pandemic follows others in the recent past and portends others in the future. America and Americans need to be investing in WHO as the only global organization capable of addressing future pandemics.

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