

**Forum:** Human Rights Council (HRC)

**Issue:** The question of the extent to which the government should aid their citizens during pandemics

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**Position:** Chairs

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## Introduction

The novel Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an infectious disease and a newly discovered coronavirus. The outbreak was first reported in Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019. COVID-19 has developed into an epidemic, turning to be the world's biggest health emergency. In addition, the COVID-19 outbreak slammed all sectors of the economy from manufacturing activity and supply chains to universities and even film production. Furthermore, it has led to a catastrophic global economic crisis: sweeping containment measures have disrupted markets around the world. COVID-19 is disrupting businesses and people's daily routines, especially in countries where COVID-19 has hit the hardest, including China, the United States, and other European countries. This is the biggest plunge since the Black Monday crash of 1987. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) claimed that the world's GDP growth could drop by 0.5 to 1 percentage points from its earlier estimate in this year. In other words, the EU is expected to lose over 15.6 billion dollars in trade, and 5.7 billion dollars for the United States .

On March 11th, the General Director of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, urged all countries to pursue containment and isolation measures to prevent the virus from spreading. Many countries started to call for actions, such as implementing the prohibition on entry into the country by individuals coming from high-coronavirus-case jurisdictions, limiting cross-border travel into the country, enacting strict measures of social distancing and avoiding close personal contact, and lastly, the imposing of the 14-days-quarantine.

However, recently on April 23rd, UN secretary general António Guterres warned that with these fresh attempts the restrictions have trampled over individual human rights or repress the free flow of information, warning that "COVID-19 is a public health emergency — that is fast becoming a human

rights crisis.” Furthermore, the concern of online surveillance and aggressive cyber policy, rise in the potential for abuse, the misinformation or disinformation of news, and lastly the use of phrases such as “Wuhan virus” may lead to discriminations. With all these concerns, the United Nations would like to draw the attention of international corporations and enhance measures to help aid the citizens during pandemics without violating human rights issues.

## Definition of Key Terms

### *Pandemic-*

A pandemic disease is defined as an extremely severe epidemic outbreak which has spread over an entire country or several continents, typically affecting a large population at the same time. Ever since the beginning of humankind, diseases and illness have plagued the human race; however, it was not until the worldwide trade network was developed from 2000B.C did the scale and spread of diseases increase dramatically. As pandemic diseases remain persistent throughout history, the death-rates of these pandemics continue to decline due to more advanced healthcare methods and the reliance on scientific knowledge rather than explanations of religion.

### *Quarantine-*

Quarantine is a practice of restricting the movement of people or animals in order to prevent the spread of diseases. Possible individuals who may have contracted the disease through close-contact with infected patients and have not yet been confirmed with a medical diagnosis will undergo this procedure to identify whether they have the disease or not. The duration of the quarantine depends on the incubation period- the time frame required for a virus to develop-of the virus. However, retaining distance from social interaction affects an individual's psyche negatively as it is mentally challenging to avoid face-to-face meetings with other people.

### *Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) -*

First identified in December 2019, in Wuhan, China, COVID-19 is a contagious disease spreading rapidly across the entire globe, affecting millions of individuals while the numbers continue to increase. Common symptoms of this novel virus include, a shortness of breath, sore throat, continuous coughing, fever, fatigue, and muscle pain. The incubation period from the time of exposure ranges from 2 to 14 days depending on the severity of the infection and health of the infected. A common method of spreading the virus is through close contact as droplets of saliva containing the virus which are produced when breathing out can survive up to 14 days on surfaces. Prevalent until this day, the continuous transmission of COVID-19 coerces governments

to adapt to the emergency by implementing unconventional policies according to the virus's development throughout the nation. These modifications caused by COVID-19 have affected the lifestyle across the globe to a certain extent, making it an essential priority to face.

### *Terminal illness-*

Terminal illness is identified as a disease that can not be treated effectively or cured. Oftentimes, terminal illnesses result in an extensive period of time slowing down the development of the disease until the patient's eventual death. In the context of healthcare, the terminally ill refers to patients diagnosed with a life-expectancy of less than 24 months. Common terminal illnesses include, advanced cancer, advanced heart diseases, lung disease, dementia, etc. According to the requirements for a disease to be identified as a terminal illness, COVID-19 is exempt from this definition as only a small percentage of patients infected with the virus have perished due to the disease.

### *Respirator-*

Worn to prevent the inhalation of harmful substances or infectious viruses, a respirator, which is shaped like a mask, is a device that is strapped around one's neck and attached directly on to the face, covering both the mouth and the nose. The filters are swapped out regularly as unwanted material collects in the filters after each use. Respirators are worn by medical professionals as personal protective equipment against the coronavirus. The most common respirator mask that is readily available, the N95, has a minimum of 95 percent of filter capacity and is capable of intercepting viruses as small as 0.3 microns.



Fig 1. N95 Respirator



Fig 2. 3M Respirator

### *Ventilator -*

A ventilator, often confused with a respirator, is a machine that assists patients with lung failure. Unlike the respirator, ventilators do not require the patients to inhale but instead are able to pump oxygen into the lungs and extract carbon dioxide. This device is only reserved for

life-dangered patients with respiratory diseases.

### *Vaccine-*

Vaccines are substances injected into the human body to stimulate common viruses which allows the immune system to acknowledge the existing virus and to combat it effectively when the virus breaches the system. Although vaccines are extremely effective, developing a vaccine typically requires years of experimenting and testing in order for it to be approved by the government and used on patients. At the moment, there are no vaccines made that are readily available to combat COVID-19.

### *Pneumonia-*

Pneumonia is the general term to describe a lung inflammation infected by a virus or bacteria. Severe cases of pneumonia may result in the air sacs to be filled with pus and obstructing the breathing tube. Common symptoms of pneumonia include fever, chills, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and a difficulty in breathing. The infectious virus, COVID-19, is identified as a type of pneumonia.

## History

On December 31, 2019, the authorities of the Hubei Province in China reported a cluster of 27 unidentified cases of pneumonia with sources connected to the Huanan Seafood Market located in Wuhan. The market was later closed down on January 1, 2020 due to samples from the market testing positive for the novel coronavirus, confirming one of the origins of this virus. By mid-January, deriving from China, several confirmed cases of COVID-19 reached beyond the borders of China into Japan, Thailand, and South Korea. This occurrence later led to infections surging rapidly across the globe through overseas traveling without proper precautions for the coronavirus. On January 3, 2020, the officials in Wuhan Province locked down the epicenter of the virus, limiting internal movement as well as restricting entry into Wuhan City. During this stage of the outbreak, China caused uncertainty regarding the actual number of infected cases by changing the definition of the virus multiple times which influenced officials from other nations to utilize different strategies to combat the spread. In response to the outbreak in China, the WHO has officially recognized the virus, declaring it as a “public health emergency of international concern.” Within the next following weeks, nations have implemented protection examinations for passengers arriving from China and airlines have been suspending flights involving heavily infected nations as departure points and destinations. It was until March 11, 2020, the

WHO General Director, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic. From this point on, more than 150 UN nations have been reported to be affected by the virus.

## Key Issues

### High Unemployment Rate

The COVID-19 outbreak is inflicting severe damage on global economies, a large range of working-class citizens are amongst the most at risk from being laid off from shuttered businesses. As of April 20th, 2,401,379 COVID-19 cases had been confirmed and caused more than 160,000 deaths worldwide. The unprecedented COVID-19 shock has already generated stress in capital markets, triggering a forceful response from central banks. Labor supply is declining because of quarantine measures and a fall in economic activity, which led to the implications for labour income and working poverty. According to the International Labor Organization, there is an increase in global unemployment in the wake of the virus. Though these estimates remain highly uncertain, the figure indicates a substantial rise in global unemployment. From the graph provided below, with the estimation of 24.7 millions of unemployed people has already overwhelmed the data from the global financial crisis of 2008-9 increased unemployment by 22 million.

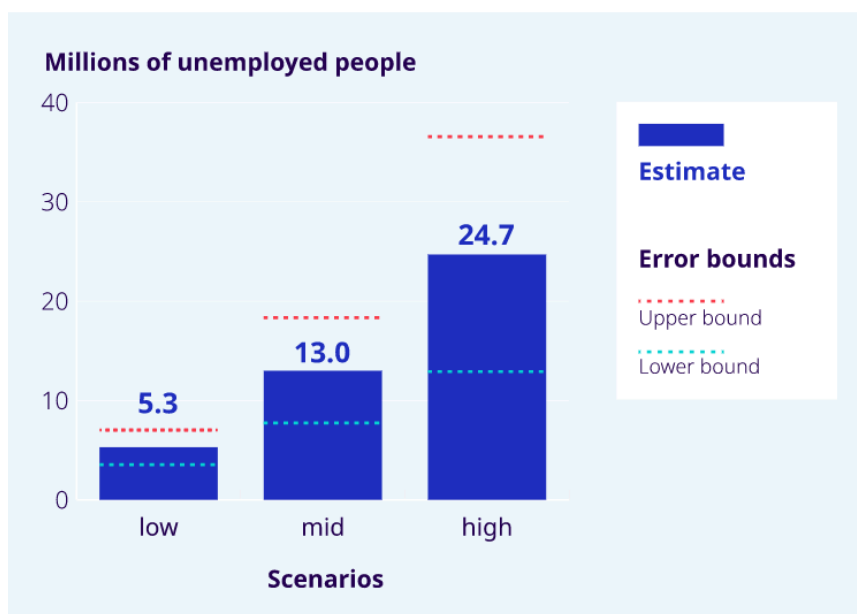


Fig 3. The World Estimation of the Significant Rise in unemployment (ILO)

### Freedom of Expression and the Access to Critical Information

On March 5th, 2020, an outbreak emerged after authorities had severely damaged public trust by brutally repressing widespread anti-government protests and lying about shooting down a civilian

airliner in Iran. As a result, Iranian authorities have struggled to assure the public that government decision-making around the COVID-19 outbreak has been in the public's best interests. The unusually high rate of reported cases of government officials contracting the virus, as well as the inconsistency in figures announced by officials and domestic media sources, have heightened concerns that the data is either being deliberately underreported or poorly collected and analyzed.

### **Ensure quarantines, lockdowns, and travel bans comply with rights norms**

According to the International human rights law, the restrictions on rights for reasons of public health or national emergency are required to be lawful, necessary, and proportionate. However, recently, the sudden lock down in many countries across the world set up restrictions such as: mandatory quarantine or isolation. Broad quarantines and lockdowns of indeterminate length rarely meet these criteria and are often imposed precipitously, without ensuring the protection of those under quarantine – especially at-risk populations. Because such quarantines and lockdowns are difficult to impose and enforce uniformly. They are often arbitrary or discriminatory in application.

Freedom of movement under international human rights law protects, in principle, “the right of everyone to leave any country, to enter their own country of nationality, and the right of everyone lawfully in a country to move freely in the whole territory of the country.” However, historically, domestic and international travel bans have often had limited effectiveness in preventing transmission, and may in fact accelerate disease spread if people flee from quarantine zones prior to their imposition.

### **Protect people in custody and in institutions**

People in prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers frequently do not receive adequate health care under normal circumstances, even in economically developed countries. Severely substandard health care has contributed to recent deaths of immigrants in the custody of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Populations in custody often include older people and people with serious chronic health conditions, meaning they are at greater risk for illness from COVID-19.

### **Food: Coronavirus could double the number of people in crisis**

The number of acutely hungry people worldwide could nearly double from 135 million to 265 million as a result of COVID-19, according to projections from the UN World Food Programme. Many countries facing severe food crises – Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Syria, Sudan, Nigeria, and Haiti, for example – don't have the resources to stage large-scale coronavirus responses on top of protecting livelihoods and family income, according to an annual report on global food insecurity drafted before the pandemic. (23 April)

## Major Parties Involved and Their Views

### *World Health Organization (WHO)-*

The World Health Organization is a non-governmental organization under the UN dedicated to combating diseases, ensuring health in developing nations, managing medicine and vaccines, and the lead agency leading the management of this outbreak. Currently, across 150 recognized nations, WHO's 70,000 staff members are distributed among nations struggling to control the coronavirus outbreak and the lack of necessary resources. On April 28, 2020, The Global Outbreak and Response Network (GOARN) was initiated by the WHO, which provoked collaboration across national and international levels to raise awareness of the threat of COVID-19 faced by multiple nations at the same time.

### *World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)-*

Cooperating closely with the WHO, the World Tourism Organization implements health measures to reduce international travel and trade, providing support to international tourism's resilience by planning recovery, and maintains regular contacts with government officials to ensure the well-being of the nations tourism industry. Due to the coronavirus's significant impact on international tourism, the UNWTO strongly suggests tourism to be placed among the priorities of the recovery process after the outbreak.

### *China-*

Originating from the epi-center Hubei province, the adversities of COVID-19 were first experienced in China. However, as the Chinese officials were initially untransparent about the virus upon its discovery, COVID-19 rapidly infected an enormous population in China, causing other nations without proper health regulations to be affected with the virus. Currently, through determined efforts by the Chinese authorities to ensure social-distancing, the confirmed cases of the virus have now started to decline rapidly. Evidently, SARS, another form of coronavirus, is highly likely to have also been traced back to a colony of bats in a cave located in China's Yunnan province. To combat this virus, the Chinese have employed many public health interventions including wearing masks and frequently washing the hands.

### *USA-*

The United States' federal government's reaction to the virus outbreak in regards to testing and implementing policies were slow, which resulted in an massive outbreak to occur in the densely populated New York, California, and Washington as citizens regarded the precautions nonchalantly. Now on the top of the list in confirmed cases each day, the policies implemented in the United States are

struggling to retain the ongoing outbreak. States, local governments, and private entities have taken immediate actions, shutting down cultural events, exhibitions, and sporting events. Although the federal government is employing policies endorsing social distancing, the rules are only loosely held in place without specific guidelines to follow. Citizens of the United States have also exhibited signs of disapproval to the government's actions by openly violating these policies as a form of protest.

### *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-*

The Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is the leading national public health institution in the United States. As the main objective of the CDC is to protect public health and safety through controlling and preventing the spread of infectious diseases, this institution conducts research and develops possible solutions to the novel coronavirus.

## Timeline of Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Event
February 2003-July 2003	<b>SARS Outbreak-</b> An epidemic involving severe respiratory syndrome affecting over 8,000 people from over 29 countries that originated from China.
2012-now	<b>MERS Outbreak-</b> An epidemic inducing sporadic cases have been reported from the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and Asia with a death rate of 35%.
November, 19, 2019	<b>Mysterious Disease-</b> Officials in China discover a mysterious pneumonia in Hubei Province.
December, 31, 2019	<b>China reporting the existence of a disease-</b> China alerted the WHO of several unusual cases of pneumonia
January, 7, 2020	<b>COVID-19-</b> WHO authorities officially identify the mysterious disease as COVID-19.
February, 10, 2020	<b>Number of confirmed cases exceeds expectations-</b> China has reported 908 deaths and 40,171 cases since the beginning of the outbreak.
March, 31, 2020	<b>Outbreak in the US-</b> The number of deaths due to COVID-19 in the US exceeds the number of deaths in China.

## Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

*The WHO response to SARS and preparation for the future (2003)*



Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak has been recognized as a global threat in the mid-March, 2003. The GOARN stepped up, coordinated by WHO, to provide rapid multidisciplinary support for outbreak response to affected populations (WHO, 2000; 2001). The GOARN provided critical operational capacity for the initial response to SARS. Responding to requests for assistance from several countries, WHO and its GOARN partners mobilized field teams to support outbreak response in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Throughout the outbreak, WHO continued to work with GOARN partners to ensure ongoing support to health authorities, and GOARN teams continued in the field until the chains of transmission were conclusively broken.

### *Science, Cooperation, and the Global Response Towards SARS*

Transparency and a commitment to sharing the best available scientific information led to a better outcome. The World Health Organization's (WHO's) network of 11 laboratories in nine countries around the world worked to combat the disease. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) deployed 84 staff members, including 52 epidemiologists, in 11 countries, to understand the outbreak in order for international laboratories to begin to work together to produce vaccines, as well as provide reliable data to health officials and the public. In detail, CDC answered 10,000 SARS calls from the media, issued 12 press releases, broadcast 21 live briefings and news conferences, and answered 35,000 phone inquiries from the general public. In addition, the CDC set up 30 conference calls to answer questions from health care providers, established a hotline for physicians through which CDC staff responded to more than 2,000 calls, and organized three satellite broadcasts directed toward clinicians that together were viewed an estimated 1.9 million times. CDC quarantine officers distributed 700,000 printed Health Alert fliers to passengers arriving in the United States on 11,840 flights from SARS-affected areas. With all these protocols, SARS reached the peak and was under control after 2 months of outbreak.

### *Early Pre-Assessment and Appraisal to Control Risk*

Taiwan has until now contained the spread of Covid-19. At the time of writing, Taiwan has not only "flattened the curve" of infections but has kept its confirmed cases below 500, even though it has been more than two months since it saw its first case. Less than 1% of the more than 60,000 tests that it has conducted so far have been positive. Staff at Taiwan's Centers for Disease Control (CDC) noticed posts on Taiwan's online forum PTT on December 31 about a disease similar to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) spreading in Wuhan, China. Taiwan's government immediately held an inter-ministerial meeting to appraise the risks, and implemented new processes to control these risks.

Beginning December 31, passengers on flights from Wuhan had to undergo health screenings before they were allowed to disembark the plane. Testing was later expanded to high-risk groups such as medical and healthcare workers who develop fever or respiratory symptoms, in order to prevent cluster infections from forming within the healthcare institutions and disrupting Taiwan's healthcare organizational capacity. Taiwan has also integrated its patient records and travel history for more efficient tracking of travelers who developed Covid-19 symptoms, as well as develop an efficient mask rationing system. Citizens are able to access an equal distribution amount of masks using their health ID card. The use of social media platforms allowed Taiwanese to have immediate access to all crucial information. When a bout of panic buying occurred when cases spiked in mid-March from repatriating Taiwanese, the reminder on Facebook urged Taiwanese to buy more food and eat healthy, reminding his audience that Taiwan is a food-producing country. Such clear risk communication has helped to allay the concerns of Taiwanese, reduce uncertainty, as well as build confidence and trustworthiness in the government's ability to handle the virus.

## Possible Solutions

### **Developing a practical vaccine that can be mass produced**

As the confirmed cases for the ongoing COVID-19 continue to rise steadily, the current methods of social distancing employed by the governments have proven to be ineffective in halting the virus's progression completely in certain countries. Vaccines, defined by the previous definition as a shot patients receive to gain immunity from certain viruses, are extremely effective in combating the spread of the virus by building the human immune system against the virus so that the immune system is able to react correctly towards an incoming virus. Thus, the development of a viable vaccine that can prevent the vaccinated population from contracting the virus would rapidly slow the spread and ultimately end the outbreak. However, the research and development of vaccines usually takes years to complete and would require extensive testing on subjects and recording results until it is licensed by the government, making it a resort that can only be utilized months or even years after the initial date of the outbreak.

### **The declaration of a national emergency in nations with rapid spreading of the virus**

Upon the first discovery of the virus, some nations were not well-informed of the situation which led to major outbreaks within the borders of unprepared nations. As the virus is only contracted through close human interaction, minimizing social gatherings can reduce contact between people, thus reducing the number of confirmed cases. China, the former nation with the most confirmed cases, employed strict lockdowns in major cities to prevent any social interactions which resulted in a rapid decline in

confirmed cases and regaining control of the situation. Although the numbers reported by the Chinese authorities have been accused to be fabricated to an extent, it is logical to conclude that lockdowns across all nations in a period of time can effectively prevent the spread of the virus and a national order must be issued in all countries with major outbreaks.

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## Appendix or Appendices

- I. Aid to low-income countries to provide relief for the poor and the vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic:  
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- VII. SARS: A Pandemic Prevented: <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/sars-pandemic-prevented>