



BY WILLIAM F. FELICE
Guest Columnist

Will conspiracy theories and anti-abortion activists sabotage the new pandemic treaty?

At a time when global health cooperation is needed more than ever to fight against rapidly spreading infectious diseases, the efforts to undermine the WHO are inexplicable and dangerous.



Here, a patient receives a vaccine for COVID-19. As is well-known, current International Health Regulations proved woefully inadequate in the face of COVID-19. The hope is that the new treaty will help prevent future infectious diseases from again creating a world of unbearable suffering and deaths. The emergency of monkeypox and the reemergence of polio demonstrate once again the essential global nature of infectious diseases. [TED S. WARREN | AP]

The World Health Organization held a series of meetings this summer to begin the process of drafting a new “pandemic treaty.” This new global treaty is intended to focus on early detection, prevention, equitable access to vaccines and the strengthening of the WHO as the coordinating authority on global health.

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Unfortunately, far-right anti-abortion activists and globalist conspiracy promoters are systematically attempting to sabotage WHO’s efforts to finalize the treaty.

In August the far-right anti-abortion “Center for Family & Human Rights” published a dire warning against the new pandemic treaty. The center bizarrely claimed that the WHO’s inclusion of a commitment to serve “vulnerable populations” by challenging “barriers that may prevent them from accessing health services,” was referring “euphemistically to laws that restrict or regulate access to abortion services.” The center also denounced the inclusion of concerns for “equity” and “non-discrimination,” stating that these were “unquestionably” terms “understood to refer to promotion of homosexuality and transgenderism.” Furthermore, the center argued that any peer review reporting process by U.N. member nations would be “manipulated to promote abortion, homosexuality and transgender ideology.”

In addition, conspiracy theories continue to flood social media with false claims that the new pandemic prevention treaty would give WHO the ability to dictate member-states responses to a health emergency. For example, former Republican Rep. Michele Bachmann asserted that the Biden administration’s amendments to the new global health law “proposed that all nations on the Earth cede their sovereignty over their national health-care decisions to the WHO.” Fact-checkers quickly disputed Bachmann’s claims. But that, of course, did not prevent Sen. Marco Rubio from piling, on stating on Twitter: “We must never allow (President) Biden to use a ‘Pandemic Treaty’ to give control over American public health decisions to the corrupt WHO.”

On Fox News, Tucker Carlson chimed in with false and inflammatory innuendo arguing that the Biden administration was giving up “power over every aspect — the intimate aspects — of your life.” Carlson continued, “So, imagine the civil liberties abuses that you lived through during the COVID lockdowns, but permanent and administered from a foreign country.” Such fear-mongering has led right-wing twitter accounts to claim: “This so-called pandemic treaty is the single, greatest global power grab that any of us has seen in our lifetime.”

The United Nations since its founding has been a target of right-wing hyperbole and fear-mongering. The false attacks on the WHO continue this reprehensible tradition. At a time when global health cooperation is needed more than ever to fight against rapidly spreading infectious diseases, the efforts to undermine the WHO are inexplicable and dangerous.

The reality is that the WHO is a very weak organization that doesn't have the ability to undertake a “global power grab” or “control American public health decisions.” In the two years leading up to the COVID crisis 2018-2019, the WHO's program budget was only \$4.4 billion, which scholars note is less than that of a single big city hospital. As the premier global health agency in a world of 8 billion people, responsible for monitoring and controlling the spread of infectious diseases around the world, the WHO is a chimera — an illusion — a Potemkin's village. The WHO is filled with highly professional and motivated international civil servants doing their best to protect our health. But unless more nations support WHO's mission, we all remain in danger of infectious diseases continuing to cross borders with impunity.

In July health experts with the highly respected medical journal *The Lancet* proposed a promising path forward. These *Lancet* professionals argue that pandemic governance should be elevated from the WHO to the U.N. General Assembly. Why is this important? A pandemic treaty approved by the U.N. General Assembly would carry a higher level of political weight than merely strengthening WHO health regulations. Such a treaty would create effective monitoring and verification mechanisms which could “trigger a high-level political response.”

A General Assembly treaty can be adopted quickly when there is the political will. For example, within 5 months of the Chernobyl disaster, the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident” was signed by heads of states, and a month later, the treaty entered into force.

Learning from this experience, the new pandemic treaty can also adopt an early notification system. When China delayed weeks before confirming a COVID outbreak, the WHO was essentially powerless to independently confirm data or operate inside a country without permission. The new pandemic treaty could create a rapid and verifiable alert system with data sharing and transparency between nations. The US should take the lead to mobilize the global community to rally behind this innovative and critical global legal health initiative.



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