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# What Is The 'Pandemic Treaty' How WHO Could Fight Future Pandemics

## Why In The News?

- The **76<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly** Is Being Held In Geneva, Switzerland, On 21 - 30 May 2023. The Theme Of This Year's Health Assembly Is **WHO At 75: Saving Lives, Driving Health For All**.
- The Head Of The World Health Organisation (WHO), **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**, Issued A Warning That The **World Must Get Ready For The Next Pandemic**, Which Might Be "Even Deadlier" Than The **COVID-19 Pandemic**, At A Time When COVID Cases Are Somewhat Stabilizing Around The World.



## Key Take Aways From The 76<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly:

- Negotiations On New Rules For Dealing With Pandemics Are Underway At The World Health Organization (WHO), With A **Target Date Of May 2024 For A Legally Binding Agreement** To Be Adopted By The U.N. Health Agency's 194 Member Countries.

- A New Pact Is A Priority For WHO Chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Who Called It A **“Generational Commitment That We Will Not Go Back To The Old Cycle Of Panic And Neglect”** At The U.N. Agency’s Annual Assembly.
- It Seeks To Shore Up The **World’s Defenses Against New Pathogens** Following The Covid-19 Pandemic That Has Killed Nearly 7 Million People.

## What Is The Pandemic Treaty?

- The WHO Already Has Binding Rules Known As The **International Health Regulations**, Which In 2005 **Set Out Countries’ Obligations** Where Public Health Events Have The **Potential To Cross Borders**. These Include **Advising The WHO** Immediately Of **A Health Emergency** And **Measures On Trade And Travel**.
- Adopted After The **2002-2003 SARs Outbreak**, These Regulations Are Still Considered **Appropriate For Regional Epidemics**, Such As Ebola But Inadequate For A Global Pandemic. These Regulations Are Also Being Reviewed In The Wake Of COVID-19.
- For The New More Wide-Reaching Pandemic Accord, Member States Have Agreed That **It Should Be Legally Binding For Those Who Sign Up**, Overcoming Early Reservations From The United States.
- It Would Be Only The Second Such Health Accord **After The 2003 Framework Convention On Tobacco Control**, A Treaty Which Aims To **Reduce Smoking Via Taxation And Rules On Labelling And Advertising**.
- However, The Proposed Treaty Has Come Under Fire On Social Media, Mostly From Right-wing Critics Warning **It Could Lead To Countries Ceding Authority To The WHO**. The Body Strongly Refutes This, Stressing That **Governments Are Leading The Negotiations And Are Free To Reject The Accord**.



## How Do Countries View The Pact?

- The European Union, Which Proposed The Accord, Is Seen As Its Biggest Backer. Developing Countries, Especially In Africa, Are Keen To Use The Negotiations To **Secure Better Access To Vaccines**, Following Allegations Of “**Vaccine Apartheid**” From The WHO’s Director-General Tedros.
- After 5 Rounds Of Formal Negotiations, The Latest 208-page Draft Of The Treaty Still Includes Thousands Of Brackets, **Which Mark Areas Of Disagreement Or Undecided Language**, Including Over The Definition Of The Word “**Pandemic**”. With So Many Countries Involved, Securing an Agreement May Be Tricky.



## How Would It Work?

- It Is Not Yet Clear How The **2005 Regulations** And The **New Pandemic Accord** Might Fit Together.
- One Suggestion Is That **They Should Be Complementary** So That **Existing Rules Apply To Local Outbreaks** With The **New Rules Kicking In If The WHO Declares A Pandemic**.

## What Other Reforms Are In The Works?

- It Is Also Not Yet Clear What Happens If The Measures Are Not Followed. A Co-chair Of The Talks Said It Would Be Preferable To Have A **Peer-review Process, Rather Than Sanction Non-compliant States**.
- Separate Talks On **Reforming The 2005 Rules** Are Taking Place, With Countries **Proposing Some 300 Amendments**. Washington’s Initial Proposals Aimed To Boost Transparency And Grant The **WHO Quicker Access To Outbreak Sites**.

- China Did Allow Who-Led Expert Teams To Visit **The Covid-19 Epicenter In Wuhan**, But The WHO Says **Beijing Is Still Withholding Clinical Data** From Early Cases That May Hold Clues About The Origins Of The Sars-cov-2 Virus.



# What Is The 'Pandemic Treaty' How WHO Could Fight Future Pandemics

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