

Introduction

The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of the World Health Organisation (WHO). It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board. The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed program budget. The Health Assembly is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

The WHA held on the 18th and the 19th May this year has been of global interest, as the world was watching it with keen interest expecting a collective leadership to battle against the pandemic. The meeting was conducted virtually, obviously as there have been travel restrictions across the world owing to COVID-19. Addressing a virtual community, Dr Tedros started his speech with a standing tribute to nurses and midwives, and all health workers, who have been on the front-lines saving lives. He ended with a powerful call for solidarity, stating: “Now more than ever, we need a healthier world. Now more than ever, we need a safer world. Now more than ever, we need a fairer world. And now more than ever, we need a stronger WHO. There is no other way forward but together.”

Since the pandemic has started there has been a continuous political blame game around different countries, making the global pandemic a more sort of political battle. Instances have been there, where China, has been blamed for keeping secrecy regarding information related to COVID-19 to instances where the USA has openly made remarks about the WHO being biased. Meanwhile, the global total passed 4.75 million cases, with deaths reaching 317,515, [according to the WHO](#), the 73rd WHA wasn't also far from a political battle, starting from the draft resolution regarding investigating the source of the pandemic to Taiwan's presence in the meeting has been of immense political stunts.



Image source: Focus Taiwan

WHA 2020: A failed attempt to ensure a global framework to fight COVID-19

After major outbreaks such as West Africa's 2014 Ebola epidemic, the WHO routinely conducts both internal and external reviews into its actions. Calls for investigations into the World Health Organization (WHO)'s role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and a probe into the source of the virus in China dominated the opening of the World Health Assembly (WHA) recently, which was held virtually. The draft resolution was initiated by the European Union and Australia and more than 100 nations including China, backed the WHA resolution that calls for an independent investigation into the COVID-19 pandemic.

The WHO's Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, kept a defensive position about the WHO's response, saying that it sounded the alarm early and often and notified countries and issued guidance for healthcare workers within the first 10 days. He added that the WHO issued the highest alert level on Jan 30, when there were fewer than 100 cases and no

deaths outside of China. The address was detailed about the efforts of WHO to ship tests and supplies to more than 120 countries, train 2.6 million healthcare workers, and organize massive efforts to speed research on treatments and vaccines. As WHO welcomed the draft resolution for an investigation, it also stressed on the need to strengthen the systems and has all the tools, science, and resources to make the world safer from pandemics, however, felt that the commitment has been quite lacking.

Meanwhile, the US representative to the WHA—Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar strongly criticized the WHO today in his [remarks](#) before the group. The US criticised WHO of not being responsible in spreading the information regarding COVID-19 timely. The representative from the United States mentioned that the country has been transparent about drug and vaccine treatment trial results, which will benefit the whole world and expected the WHO's operations to be transparent too, and stressed for an independent review of every aspect of WHO's response to the pandemic.



Chinese President Xi Jinping addressing the World Health Assembly/ Image Source: Xinhua

Chinese President Xi Jinping [addressed the World Health Assembly](#) (WHA) and firmly asserted that China acted with openness and full transparency in a “most timely manner,” sharing the new virus’ genome at the “earliest possible time.” and underlined the decisive

role played by the WHO. President Xi reasserted China's leadership at the "central position" on the international scene. He offered to increase cooperation in information sharing and international cooperation in medical research, "putting people first" before financial interests and asked for better "global governance in the area of public health," Meanwhile, Chinese President did not reject the increasingly popular idea of a "comprehensive review" into COVID-19, but spoke of a review focusing on "global responses" rather than the origins of the virus. It should be "based on science," a code word used to reject any "political" criticism.

President Xi also mobilized his concept of "shared future for the people of the world to work as one." To reach out to Europe, and try to diffuse critics, he mentioned the necessity to "safeguard our planet" and the global commons, a theme at the center of the recent — censored — letter sent by European ambassadors to Beijing to commemorate the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations with the PRC. China also offered to contribute to a "humanitarian depot" and "fast track health corridors," in order "to guarantee medical equipment delivery" and reverse a global feeling of insecurity regarding the PRC's monopoly of these strategic resources. China also proposed to provide \$2 billion over two years to help fight the coronavirus, focusing on developing countries.



The WHO director-general, Tedros Adhanom, and world leaders speak via video link to the World Health Assembly. Image Source: World Health Organization/AFP via Getty Images

Conclusion

There were a lot of hopes, around the WHA 2020, whether the meeting would bring out something concrete. If analysed the two-day event, which was historic during the time of pandemic came out more of political theatrics and the interest was more of 'power balance'. Though countries detailed their efforts at the individual level to fight against COVID-19, there was a clear lack of holistic understanding, a global framework which came out of the meeting.

Though, countries had their critical understanding but lacked a cohesive discussion on building towards a global relief fund, contribution towards inventing vaccines, or any policy

level discussion to ensure that such incidents in future aren't repeated.

In the closing remarks, WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said "COVID-19 has robbed us of people we love. It's robbed us of lives and livelihoods; it's shaken the foundations of our world; it threatens to tear at the fabric of international cooperation. But it also reminded us that for all our differences, we are one human race, and we are stronger together."

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Kootneeti Team

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