

Washington's WHO funding freeze ill-timed, irresponsible



The United States announced on Tuesday that it is going to halt its funding to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Washington's decision, which seeks to put "America First," serves to frustrate the pandemic containment efforts of the United States and the rest of the world.

It could not come at a worse time. The global fight against the pandemic is now at a critical stage, with COVID-19 cases approaching 2 million and the death toll topping 125,000.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in a statement that it is "not the time to reduce the resources for the operations of the World Health Organization or any other humanitarian organization in the fight against the virus."

It is also a highly irresponsible decision. The WHO has made obvious achievements since the outbreak and met with wide approval. It has been closely following the situation, publishing critical information in a timely fashion, and keeping countries around the globe on high alert against this dangerous virus.

There are voices from inside the United States opposing the funding freeze. Lawrence Gostin, director of the O'Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University, called cutting funding to

the WHO during a global health crisis "shortsighted" and "disgraceful," and warned that it would cause deaths and even blow back on the United States.

Other nations around the world have also spoken up for the WHO. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas tweeted that "apportioning blame doesn't help. The virus knows no borders ... We have to work closely together against COVID-19. One of the best investments is to strengthen the UN, especially the under-funded WHO."

The United States, the current epicenter of the pandemic and also the world's sole superpower, bears a critical responsibility in this epic global fight.

However, Washington is not only trying to shirk its responsibility, but also seeks to undermine the WHO's irreplaceable role in coordinating global efforts to combat the pandemic.

For countries which are still struggling with rising COVID-19 cases and are highly dependent on the guidance, equipment and concrete life-saving services provided by the WHO, notably those in Africa, the funding freeze is no doubt a great shock.

And in this age of interdependence, Washington is in fact shooting itself in the foot by impairing the much-needed global drive to push back the pandemic.

Last but not least, the funding freeze only gives a new example to show that Washington has always been ready to bully in the name of self-interest.

In recent years, the current U.S. administration has indulged in making unilateral moves, such as withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement, quitting the Iran nuclear deal, and exiting the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Washington's my-way-or-the-highway approach has seriously eroded the foundation for international cooperation and the post-WWII world order built on the spirit of multilateralism.

Right now, as medical professionals, policy makers and ordinary people work around the clock and across borders to save lives, Washington's highly politicized decision shows no respect for their huge sacrifices, and merely makes the battle harder.

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