

Trump announces U.S. will permanently cut ties with World Health Organization



Washington, May 29 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump announced Friday that the United States will cut ties with the World Health Organization. Earlier this month, Trump threatened to permanently cut off U.S. funding of the WHO. He has claimed the WHO is “China-centric” and blames the agency for advising against China travel bans early in the outbreak.

“China has total control over the World Health Organization despite only paying \$40 million per year compared to what the United States has been paying, which is approximately \$450 million a year,” Trump said during a news conference in the White House Rose Garden.

Trump has repeatedly criticized the WHO’s response to the coronavirus, which has hit the U.S. worse than any other country, amid scrutiny of his own administration’s response to the pandemic. He has claimed the WHO is “China-centric” and blames the agency for advising against China travel bans early in the outbreak.

The agency has defended its initial response to the coronavirus pandemic, saying it gave world leaders enough time to intervene early in the outbreak.

The agency declared COVID-19 a global health emergency on January 30th when there were only 82 cases outside of China and zero deaths, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said during a press conference on May 1st. “Meaning, the world had enough time to intervene.”

On Friday, Trump said the WHO “failed to make the requested greatly needed reform” and the U.S. “will be today terminating our relationship with the World Health Organization and redirecting those funds to other worldwide and deserving urgent global public health needs.”

The WHO’s funding runs in two-year budget cycles. For the 2018 and 2019 funding cycle, the U.S. paid a \$237 million required assessment as well as \$656 million in voluntary contributions, averaging \$446 million a year and representing about 14.67% of its total budget, according to WHO spokesman Tarik Jasarevic.

It’s unclear exactly what mechanism Trump intends to use to terminate WHO funding, much of which is appropriated by Congress. The president typically does not have the authority to unilaterally redirect congressional funding.

Lawrence Gostin, a professor and faculty director of the O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law at Georgetown University, said in a tweet Friday that Trump’s move is “unlawful” because pulling funding requires Congress, which has already authorized funding. It’s also “dangerous” because “we’re in the middle of a pandemic,” he said.

On May 20, WHO officials said they worried the agency’s emergency programs would suffer if the president permanently pulled U.S. funding from the international agency. Most funding from the United States goes directly out to the program that helps countries in “all sorts of fragile and difficult settings,” Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of WHO’s health emergencies program, said at the time.

“We’ll obviously have to work with other partners to ensure those funds can still flow,” Ryan said. “This is going to be a major implication for delivering essential health services to some of the most vulnerable people in the world, and we trust developed donors will, if necessary, step in to fill that gap.”

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