

Following Trump, Argentina withdraws from World Health Organization



Buenos Aires, February 5 (RHC)-- Argentina has announced it will withdraw from the World Health Organization, further imperilling an international agency charged with coordinating public health responses.

The announcement on Wednesday echoes a similar move last month from the United States. Far-right administrations currently govern both countries, and President Javier Milei of Argentina has a close relationship with his U.S. counterpart, Donald Trump. The two leaders have each criticized the World Health Organization for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A United Nations agency, the organization cannot mandate governments to follow its guidance, but it does offer research and recommendations for how countries might collaborate to address public health crises like pandemics.

Still, on Wednesday, Milei blamed the World Health Organization for its advice about physical distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“That is why we have decided to leave such a nefarious organization that was the executing arm of what was the greatest experiment in social control in history,” Milei wrote on social media. He punctuated his message with a campaign slogan: “LONG LIVE FREEDOM, DAMN IT.”

Milei was elected in 2023 amid spiralling inflation in Argentina. A dark horse in the race, he ran on a platform of slashing government expenses with his signature “chainsaw” approach.

He has described himself as an “anarcho-capitalist”. But while month-to-month inflation has stabilised under his leadership, Argentina’s poverty rate has climbed to upwards of 50 percent.

Critics have blasted his administration for cutting key public services over the past year that might have help address this crisis, including funding for soup kitchens that provide food for the poor. Argentina contributes approximately \$8.257 million to the World Health Organization, as of 2024.

In an official government news release, however, Milei’s administration accused the organisation of heightening Argentina’s economic crisis. “Quarantines caused one of the greatest economic catastrophes in world history,” the official statement read.

It alleged that self-distancing models ran afoul of the Rome Statute of 1998, which establishes the International Criminal Court’s jurisdiction over key international crimes, like genocide and crimes against humanity.

The WHO’s guidance about self-isolating, Milei’s government argued, was itself a crime against humanity. “In our country, the WHO supported a government that left children out of school, hundreds of thousands of workers without income, led businesses and SMEs [small- and medium-sized enterprises] to bankruptcy, and still cost us 130,000 lives,” its statement said.

Milei’s government also questioned the integrity of the World Health Organization’s research. “Today the evidence indicates that the WHO’s recipes do not work because they are the result of political influence, not based on science,” the statement said.

The heated rhetoric was a reflection of Trump’s similar order on January 20th. Hours after he was inaugurated into a second term as U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order rescinding US funding from the World Health Organization, alleging a “mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic.”

Trump also accused the agency of an “inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states.”

The U.S. is the single biggest contributor to the World Health Organization’s budget, responsible for 14.4 percent of its budget or close to \$1 billion. Its withdrawal is expected to cause cost-cutting — and potential rollbacks of services.

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