World Health Organization pleads for $675 million to fight coronavirus

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The World Health Organization (WHO) yesterday issued a plea for $675 million a month to fight the global coronavirus pandemic. This came as confirmed cases of COVID-19 surpassed 145,000, including upwards of 7,700 new cases in Italy, Iran, Spain, Germany and France alone. At least 93 countries reported at least one new case and at least 442 deaths were reported in the last 24 hours, raising the death toll above 5,400.

"We are at a critical point in the global response to COVID-19, we need everyone to get involved in this massive effort to keep the world safe," WHO Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated. Referencing the vast spread of the coronavirus, he noted: "More cases are now being reported every day than were reported in China at the height of its epidemic."

While Dr. Tedros praised the response of South Korea, Singapore and Japan for their "aggressive testing and contact tracing," which has so far kept the mortality rates in those countries relatively low, he warned against any complacency. "Any country that looks at the experience of other countries with large epidemics and thinks 'that won't happen to us' is making a deadly mistake. It can happen to any country."

While WHO officials did not name names, it is not a stretch to relate the last comment to the response of the US political establishment to the pandemic. Instead of providing the necessary resources to combat the greatest public health crisis the United States has faced in decades, the Federal Reserve instead yesterday announced it will provide $1.5 trillion to the financial sector in an effort to reverse the collapse of the stock market seen over the past several days.

If this sort of money had been made available to the world to stop the coronavirus when it first emerged, its spread would have been stopped cold. Those that were infected could have received the best treatment, saving potentially thousands of lives. The economic disruption to the lives of workers caused by any necessary quarantines could have been mitigated. COVID-19 would have remained a deadly but ultimately small outbreak.

The concern instead was not for the lives lost and that will be lost in the weeks to come, but whether or not Wall Street needed a bailout. It was only when the Dow Jones lost more than $2 trillion of its market capitalization that the US government intervened.

In his press conference today, US President Donald Trump announced a "national emergency" as a result of the pandemic, while at the same time maintaining the lie that the "risk to the average American is still very low." In reality, there are currently 2,269 confirmed coronavirus cases in the US and that number is slated to increase by a factor of 10 every seven days. At the current rate of spread, the number of COVID-19 cases in the US will surpass those in China in two weeks.

Officials at WHO also made the point that travel bans, such as those imposed on Wednesday by Trump against Europe, are generally ineffective. In a statement from February 29, before Trump's ban was in place, it stated, "WHO continues to advise against the application of travel or trade restrictions to countries experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks."

The statement continued: "In general, evidence shows that restricting the movement of people and goods during public health emergencies is ineffective in most situations and may divert resources from other interventions. Furthermore, restrictions may interrupt needed aid and technical support, may disrupt businesses, and may have negative social and economic

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effects on the affected countries.”

This again applies most sharply to the US government, which has refused coronavirus testing kits from WHO and China, which have been proven to work, insisting instead on using kits developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In every aspect, the deployment and use of these kits has been bungled and mismanaged. They were not available until the middle of February and were not distributed to every state until March. Patients exhibiting some but not all of the symptoms have been turned away from doctors, clinics and hospitals, despite the fact that the virus is known to spread even when its victims have no symptoms.

The breakdown of testing in the United States was openly admitted during a House hearing on Wednesday. Doctor Anthony Fauci, the Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and one of the members of the task force ostensibly assembled to combat the coronavirus in the US, was forced to state: “The system is not really geared to what we need right now.”

Fauci attempted an about face to this statement during Trump’s press conference, agreeing with the president’s claim that the CDC would be able to do five million tests by the end of the month. Virtually every account of those attempting to get tested on social media or in the mainstream news says the opposite: that getting tested is still essentially impossible in the United States.

In addition, while tests done by the CDC itself are free, much of the testing has been outsourced to the private sector, including to corporations such as DiaSorin Molecular and Qiagen. For those with insurance, just to be tested for the coronavirus can cost up to $500. For the 27 million Americans without health insurance, the cost is often triple that—a price that the majority of people simply cannot afford. Workers are being forced to choose to go bankrupt or risk the lives of their friends, coworkers, neighbors and family.

The situation will only become more acute as the pandemic spreads unimpeded. The US health care system, like those in Europe, is being taxed beyond its limit and the number of cases is only set to rise. The neglect and criminality by Trump and his fellow oligarchs directed towards the working class means that the death toll in the country could rise into the millions.

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