World Health Organization falsely declares end of COVID-19 public health emergency

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6 May 2023

On Friday, World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced the formal ending of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) first declared on January 30, 2020.

This decision has no scientific basis, but rather serves to provide *ex post facto* justification for all capitalist governments' scrapping of anti-COVID public health measures since the emergence of the Omicron variant in November 2021.

The WHO announcement was clearly influenced by the United States, which, as the world's dominant imperialist power, largely controls the WHO's parent organization, the United Nations. It came less than a week before the Biden administration formally ends the national COVID-19 public health emergency on May 11, putting an end to all official response to the pandemic in the US. The WHO announcement grants legitimacy to this reactionary and unscientific policy shift.

It also follows the catastrophic lifting of the Zero-COVID elimination policy in China, which produced a horrific wave of mass infection and death, killing over 1 million people in just three months. Every country in the world has now lifted all anti-COVID mitigation measures, and the coronavirus is spreading freely, evolving into new variants at an accelerating pace.

The WHO's ending of the PHEIC represents a complete and total abrogation of all modern public health policy, which has centered on preventing and stopping outbreaks of deadly pathogens and fighting for the elimination and eradication of communicable diseases.

The same organization that at the start of the pandemic denounced the "alarming levels of inaction" and the "moral decay" of governments that allowed COVID-19 to spread unchecked, is now the most influential advocate of the criminal policy of "herd immunity," or "forever COVID," embraced by every capitalist government.

By any objective standard, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to meet the WHO's definition of a PHEIC: "an extraordinary event which is determined to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease and to potentially require a coordinated international response."

To justify its ending of the PHEIC, the WHO claims that official COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths are on the decline. But official figures are well known to be vast undercounts due to the global dismantling of COVID-19 testing and data reporting systems. WHO officials themselves, including Ghebreyesus, have repeatedly highlighted this contradiction over the past year, but now choose to ignore it.

The only way to estimate the real state of the pandemic is by monitoring viral levels in wastewater and excess deaths above pre-pandemic levels. Both figures show that COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc globally.

At present, there remain more than 12,000 global excess deaths attributable to the pandemic each day, according to Our World in Data and *The Economist*. This amounts to more than 1 million people killed every three months, clearly an "extraordinary" level of preventable death, which requires "a coordinated international response."

This daily death toll has spiked considerably since March, as the highly immune-evasive and infectious Omicron XBB.1.16 "Arcturus" subvariant became dominant in India. This subvariant is now spreading globally. It is only the latest in a continuous string of new variants, which "constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease."

Furthermore, a recent comprehensive study conservatively estimated that more than 65 million people are suffering from Long COVID globally. Each new wave of infections only deepens this historically unprecedented post-viral health crisis, which in itself constitutes "an extraordinary event" that "requires a coordinated international response."

In recent weeks, numerous scientists have warned of the ongoing dangers of viral evolution, which will continue to undermine existing vaccines and treatments. In fact, on the same day that the PHEIC was revoked, the *Washington Post*

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published an article noting that the White House was recently briefed by experts who estimate that "there's a roughly 20 percent chance during the next two years of an outbreak rivaling the onslaught of illness inflicted by the omicron variant." It added that "one widely regarded scientist pegged the risk at a more alarming level, suggesting a 40 percent chance of an omicron-like wave."

Contradicting Friday's announcement, just last week Ghebreyesus himself acknowledged the immense global toll of Long COVID and the dangers of viral evolution, stating, "An estimated 1 in 10 infections results in post-COVID-19 condition [Long COVID], suggesting that hundreds of millions of people will need long-term care. And, as the emergence of the new XBB.1.16 variant illustrates, the virus is still changing, and is capable of causing new waves of disease and death."

According to the statement issued by the WHO, the International Health Regulations (IHR) Emergency Committee advised Ghebreyesus that "it is time to transition to long-term management of the COVID-19 pandemic." The "transition to long-term management" is simply a rephrasing of the propaganda slogan issued endlessly by capitalist politicians and media pundits that society must "learn to live with the virus." It is, in effect, a declaration that the pandemic will be perpetual, that it will continue to infect, kill and maim without end.

Principled scientists and anti-COVID advocates responded to the WHO announcement with a combination of dismay and anger that the international health agency would succumb to political pressure.

Dr. Elisa Perego, a Long COVID patient and advocate, tweeted, "We're being forced to 'live with' a SARS virus which has killed an estimated 15+ millions and affected the health of hundreds of millions. This is a deranged, calamitous policy that will affect global health for generations. The architects of this deserve to go down in history."

This is only the latest in a continuous series of debacles and crimes for which the world's leading public health institutions are culpable. For the first two years of the pandemic, until late December 2021, the WHO continuously denied that COVID-19 is an airborne pathogen that spreads primarily through aerosols produced by speaking, shouting or even just breathing, and which linger in the air and can infect anyone who then breathes them in.

The aerosolized spread of COVID-19 was evident and explained by principled scientists at the very beginning of the pandemic, whom the WHO repeatedly ignored. As a result, the majority of the world's population remains ignorant of this most basic science of the pandemic and the importance of using high quality masks and air filters.

Through its latest actions, the WHO is inflicting untold suffering on future generations. The long-term population-level consequences of continuous, repeated infections with COVID-19 will be immense. One must ask, what will happen to children today and future generations who can anticipate infections with multiple variants of COVID-19, once or twice a year, for the next 10 years or more?

In the most conservative estimates, upwards of 80,000 people will die of COVID-19 each year in the US alone under this scheme. Most likely, this figure will be closer to a quarter million, based on a critical modeling analysis conducted by Fractal Therapeutics under a similar scenario of ending the public health emergency. Extrapolated globally, upwards of 5 million people could needlessly die of COVID-19 each year for the foreseeable future.

The development of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the sclerotic and reactionary character of all capitalist institutions, including the WHO. Established in the aftermath of the imperialist maelstrom of World War II, which killed over 70 million people, the WHO and UN function as arms of the archaic nation-state system and initially attempted to stabilize the inherent contradictions of capitalist production.

The historic trajectory of the WHO parallels that of world capitalism as a whole, which over the past half-century has become increasingly characterized by ever-rising social inequality, unending imperialist war orchestrated by the US, the resurgence of fascism and anti-democratic tendencies, and escalating attacks on all the social rights of the working class, including the right to health and longevity.

The pandemic triggered an acceleration of all of these processes. Fundamentally, it has revealed that capitalism is at war with society. The fight for a revival and massive expansion of public health globally requires the building of a socialist movement in the international working class, fighting to reorganize society in the interests of the vast majority, not the narrow profit interests of a tiny financial oligarchy.

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