

United States blocks UN pandemic preparedness declaration

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At a meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, the United States formally objected to a nonbinding political declaration on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The objection blocked adoption of the document by consensus, and it now goes to the full General Assembly for further consideration and a vote.

The US representative, Erica Schwartz, director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), declared that the Trump administration's opposition was due to "the inclusion of divisive ideologies that lack definitional consensus" and "references to an unfinished negotiation on pathogen access and benefit sharing in an agreement that failed to achieve international consensus."

The "divisive ideologies" were the declaration's references to global solidarity and universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, which the Trump administration had sought to strip from the text. The "unfinished negotiation" is the fight over who will profit from the vaccines and drugs developed in the next pandemic.

Helen Clark, a former prime minister of New Zealand and co-chair of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, said, "Agreeing to collaborate to prevent, prepare for and respond to pandemics should not be controversial." The declaration is nonbinding and, like the Pandemic Agreement itself, contains no enforcement mechanism. Its adoption would not have compelled any government to act differently in the next pandemic.

Although not formally part of the World Health Organization (WHO) Pandemic Agreement, the declaration was intended to build momentum and political will to break the impasse on the outstanding issues holding up that agreement.

The World Health Assembly adopted the Pandemic Agreement in May 2025, but the agreement cannot be opened for signature and ratification until member states complete an annex establishing the Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing (PABS) system. Negotiators missed the original deadline of May 2026, and the deadline has been pushed back to the World Health Assembly in May 2027. The most contentious issues center on the fight over the proceeds derived from intellectual property developed during a global health emergency.

The US was not alone. The European Union said the text "falls short of our goals" and set out "explicit red lines," chiefly against language supporting compulsory licensing, insisting that technology transfer "must be voluntary and on mutually agreed terms." Germany said it "would have hoped for a more balanced approach." These European objections amount to the same defense of corporate profit as the US position. Italy, which refused to back the Pandemic Agreement itself, also rejected the text, objecting to the expansion of the WHO's role.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pleaded at the meeting for a conclusion of the PABS negotiations. "Get PABS done, as soon as possible," he said. "Please conclude the negotiation as soon as possible."

Poorer nations insist that any genetic sequences of pathogens obtained from their citizens should result in rapid, low-cost or even free sharing back to them of any technologies developed using those sequences. But these voices are those of the national bourgeoisies of less developed nations arguing for their share of the proceeds. They are not speaking on behalf of workers and their health. In particular, Brazil and India have large pharmaceutical industries that stand to benefit

from the production and sale of vaccines and antivirals created during a pandemic.

As a gambit to break the political deadlock over intellectual property, the declaration thus ran into the same objections and forces that have stalled the Pandemic Agreement itself.

Schwartz's two objections, the attack on reproductive health and the defense of pharmaceutical patents, express the interests of the forces that have been assaulting public health in the United States. The main driver is a ruling class that has installed a fascist in the White House to maintain its position through war abroad and attacks on the working class at home.

As part of the latter, the Trump administration has launched multiple broadsides against public health. It has gutted the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and numerous other agencies responsible for protecting workers and the general public. It has engaged in a full-frontal assault on vaccines, led by Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr., which has resulted in a resurgence of measles and associated deaths. And it has systematically undermined the response to the H5N1 "bird flu" outbreaks in cattle and other mammals.

In addition, rejecting the declaration is not the only blow the US has delivered to the WHO and its Pandemic Agreement. In January 2026, the US formally withdrew from the WHO entirely. As reported by the WSWWS at the time:

The US departure has triggered a fiscal crisis within the WHO, forcing the agency to cut its 2026–2027 budget to approximately \$4.2 billion and eliminate nearly one quarter of its global workforce. Despite a 20 percent increase in assessed contributions from other member states, the organization continues to face a projected funding shortfall of about \$1.05 billion, worsened by the US refusal to pay between \$200 million and \$278 million in outstanding arrears.

All of this takes place amid the second-largest Ebola outbreak on record, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which had infected more than 8,000 people and

killed more than 3,900 as of September 28. The COVID-19 pandemic, meanwhile, rages on, now in its 13th wave in the US, where population immunity is at its lowest point since 2021, just before the massive Omicron wave.

Unable to stop the existing pandemic for more than six years, the capitalist system stumbles into the future with the profit motive at the core of nearly five years of acrimony and disputes, not over how to prevent and confront coming pandemics, but over how to divide the profits from the vaccines, drugs and other products developed in response to them.

The contradiction between the global forces of production and the division of the world into rival nation-states places humanity at great peril, leaving it vulnerable to the next global health emergency.

The only social force capable of solving that contradiction, putting the protection of human health ahead of profits and truly preparing the world for future infectious disease threats, is the international working class. That class must expropriate the pharmaceutical monopolies, establish a global socialist public health system and prioritize social need.

The working class can take control of global public health only if it is organized independently of all capitalist parties. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its national sections, including the Socialist Equality Party (US), exist to resolve the crisis of leadership in the working class and provide that organization.



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