

Global emergency efforts ramp up as pandemic deaths soar

March 23 2020, by Alexandria Sage and Dmitry Zaks With Afp Bureaus



Italian healthcare workers are exhausted from their war against the new coronavirus.

A global push to slow the spread of the coronavirus ramped up Monday with more governments imposing emergency lockdowns that have put

more than 1.7 billion people confined to their homes.

In the face of the relentless march of the virus, the United Nations appealed for an immediate ceasefire in the world's conflict zones, and France and China called for urgent talks of the G20 major economies to coordinate an international response to the escalating crisis.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that the pandemic was clearly "accelerating" as the number of deaths surged close to 16,000, with over 350,000 declared infections, according to an AFP tally based on official sources.

More than 10,000 have now died in Europe alone, the new epicentre of the disease.

But Tedros added: "We are not helpless bystanders. We can change the trajectory of this pandemic."

From New Zealand and South Africa announcing new lockdowns, Germany banning even small gatherings, Italy barring domestic travel and Hong Kong shutting its borders to non-residents, the new round of containment efforts highlighted a deepening sense of panic around the world.

At least 1.7 billion people globally have now been asked to stay home in line with mandatory or recommended measures rolled out by increasingly anxious governments, according to an AFP count.



Nearly a third of all Americans are under a lockdown to stop the spread of the coronavirus

Tedros acknowledged that a number of countries were struggling to take more aggressive measures because of a lack of resources.

But while praising the energy being put into finding a vaccine, he cautioned that there was currently no proven effective treatment.

Markets on both sides of the Atlantic were hammered again as the virus continued to wreak havoc on the global economy, spurring fears of a global fallout not seen since the Great Depression.

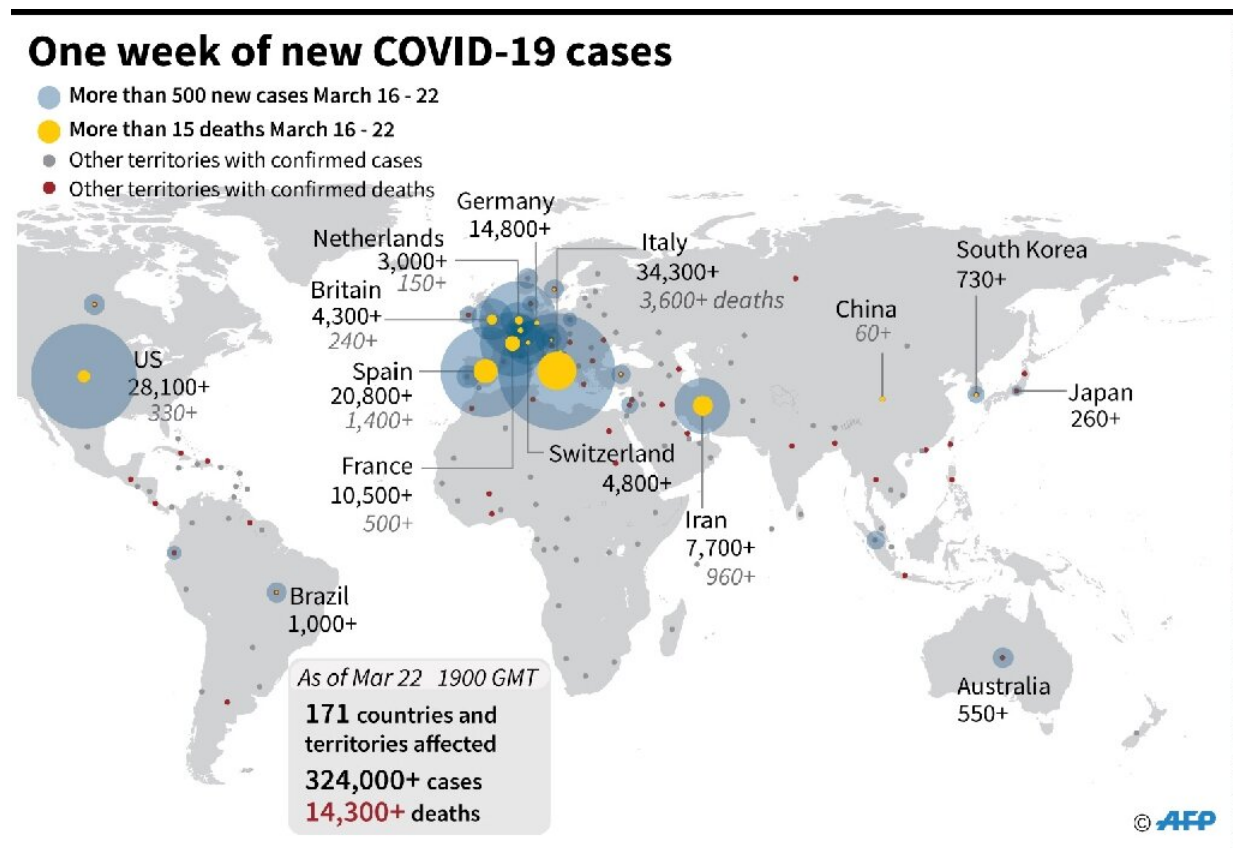
And with major cultural and sporting already wiped off the calendar,

there are mounting calls to postpone the Tokyo Olympics and Japan's prime minister admitted delay could be "inevitable".

'Necessary measures'

With war-ravaged Syria announcing its first coronavirus case, UN chief Antonio Guterres appealed for a worldwide ceasefire to protect the vulnerable in conflict zones.

"The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war," he said.



Graphic showing summary of the largest number of daily cases of COVID-19 from March 16-22.

In Italy, now the hardest hit country, the death toll passed 6,000. But the number of single-day deaths was slightly down on Sunday, offering a glimmer of hope it may finally be turning a corner.

Other European nations also continue to choke people's movement, with Greece the latest to follow Italy, Spain and France in imposing a nationwide lockdown.

Normally bustling city streets in Greece were suddenly deserted.

"It's a bit of a hassle... but these measures are necessary and we'll get used to them," said Athens resident Maria Bourras, who leaves her house regularly to walk her dog.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Sunday announced a ban on gatherings of more than two people, before putting herself in quarantine after learning she had been treated by an infected doctor.

Her office said the 65-year-old was "doing well" and her first test came back negative.



A curfew was imposed in some areas of France with police patrolling the streets

'We're at war'

Italy banned travel and shut down a range of industries and businesses, while residents were finding creative ways to pass the time indoors as shut-in measures neared the two-week mark.

"Since I can't go out, I do gymnastic exercises in my house. I drink at least five times a day: I've got five glasses of water lined up in my kitchen so I don't forget!" 86-year-old Rome resident Carla Basagni told AFP.

Spain readied to extend its state of emergency, which bars people from leaving home unless absolutely essential, until April 11.

It reported another spike in fatalities, bringing its total to 2,182 dead—the third highest in the world after Italy and China.

Residents across France also remained shut in their homes and the government said lockdown measures could extend past the end of March as the death toll reached 860.

Meanwhile Britain inched towards similar tough measures, with the government under pressure to clamp down after crowds flocked to holiday hotspots and beaches at the weekend, defying social distancing recommendations.



Roughly one billion people around the world are enduring quarantines

Markets reeled after the US mega rescue package collapsed, sending bourses in Asia, Europe and the US on a downward spiral again.

US President Donald Trump hinted he was running out of patience with the economic shutdown caused by the mass quarantine measures.

"WE CANNOT LET THE CURE BE WORSE THAN THE PROBLEM ITSELF," he tweeted.

Trump had on Sunday ordered thousands of emergency hospital beds to be set up at coronavirus hotspots as a trillion-dollar economic rescue package crashed in the Senate.

"We're at war, in a true sense we're at war," he said.

More than a third of Americans are under various forms of lockdown, including in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, but the number of infections nationally has continued to climb.

Highlighting the desperation in the world's biggest economy, the mayor of New York pleaded for desperately needed hospital supplies and urged Trump to enforce a nationwide lockdown.

Public figures with the new coronavirus

► COVID-19

CULTURE



◀ US actors **Tom Hanks** and his wife **Rita Wilson**

► **Luis Sepulveda**
Chilean writer



◀ **Placido Domingo**
Spanish tenor

► **Manu Dibango**
Cameroonian jazz star saxophonist



◀ **Harvey Weinstein**
Jailed former Hollywood producer

POLITICS



◀ **Angela Merkel**
German Chancellor in quarantine, awaiting results



► **Javier Solana**
Former NATO General Secretary



◀ **Rand Paul**
US senator



► **Paulo Dybala** (ARG) and **Blaise Matuidi** (FRA) Juventus players among others in Italian Serie A clubs



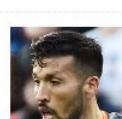
◀ **Peter Dutton**
Australian Home Affairs Minister



► **Franck Riester**
French Culture Minister



◀ **Sophie Gregoire Trudeau**
Wife of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau



► **Ezequiel Garay** (Valencia) among other players in Spanish Liga



► **Rudy Gobert** (Utah Jazz) and other players in US NBA including **Kevin Durant** (Brooklyn Nets)



◀ **Iraj Harirchi**
Iranian Deputy Health Minister



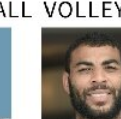
► **Michel Barnier**
EU chief Brexit negotiator



◀ **Prince Albert**
of Monaco



► **Lorenzo Sanz** ex-president of Real Madrid died Saturday



► **Earvin Ngapeth**
Star of French national team

Source : Photos AFP

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Celebrities and politicians who have tested positive for the new coronavirus.

IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said it stands "ready to deploy all our \$1 trillion lending capacity" and warned that the recession could be at least as bad as during the global financial crisis.

And Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison bluntly told his compatriots they faced an economic crisis akin to the 1930s Great Depression.

Moral burden

As the pandemic overwhelms hospitals, doctors are having to prioritise patients based on their chances of survival, inflicting a huge moral

burden.

"We go into medicine to heal people. Not to make choices about who can live," said Philippe Devos, an anaesthesiologist in Belgium.

The virus emerged in China in December, after first being detected at a market that sold wild animals for human consumption in the central city of Wuhan.

Beijing has since sought to sow doubts over whether the virus began in Wuhan, while portraying itself as a saviour in the global fight and a role model for quarantines.

On Monday it reported no new local cases of the virus, while life slowly started returning to normal in Wuhan.

But there are fears across Asia of "imported" cases from Europe and other hotspots.

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