

States must ensure just pandemic response, vaccines for all: UN rights council

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The UN's top rights body adopted a resolution Thursday highlighting states' responsibilities in addressing pandemics, despite criticism the text, backed by China and Russia among others, shied away from addressing civil and political rights.

The UN Human Rights Council adopted by consensus the resolution emphasising "the central role of the State in responding to pandemics and other health emergencies".

The text, which comes as close to 600,000 people have died from the novel coronavirus and over 13.5 million have been infected since the outbreak emerged in China late last year, points to "socioeconomic consequences" of such crises.

It highlights the impact on sustainable development and [human rights](#), and insists that any emergency measures taken by states in response to COVID-19 must abide by their "obligations under applicable human rights law."

The text also stresses the importance of "equitable and unhindered access" to diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, insisting that any vaccine developed against COVID-19 should be considered a "global public good".

But while the text, sponsored by more than a dozen countries, passed without a vote, it faced harsh criticism from the European Union and

others for being presented hastily at the last minute and for being too narrow in scope.

"The EU is of the opinion that a number of important elements are missing from this resolution," German Ambassador Michael Freherr von Ungern-Sternberg told the council, speaking on behalf of the bloc.

He lamented that the sponsors of the text had not been willing to heed calls from a range of countries for the resolution to be postponed until the next council session in September to give time for broader negotiations.

"We believe that such an important topic deserves better preparation and more time for in-depth discussions."

While hailing the focus on limiting the impact of economic consequences of the [pandemic](#), he stressed that "COVID-19 not only impacts on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, but also on civil and political rights.

"This should have been mentioned in the resolution," he said, adding though that the EU had decided to join the consensus to ensure council unity on such an important topic.

The resolution meanwhile called for the UN rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, to conduct a "needs assessment" focused in particular on developing countries, to "support their efforts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in responding to pandemics and other health emergencies."

It requested that she submit a report to the council on the issue in one year's time.

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