

Despite toll, never too late to fight pandemic: WHO chief

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The grim milestone of one million COVID-19 deaths should spur the planet into fighting back against the disease, the WHO insisted Tuesday, saying it was "never too late to turn things around".

The World Health Organization's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said there were encouraging signs of hope, citing [vaccine candidates](#) in

final-stage trials.

And he said that while the world awaited scientific breakthroughs, the new coronavirus could be effectively contained through proven public health measures.

"One million people have now been lost to COVID-19 and many more are suffering because of the [pandemic](#)," Tedros said in an article in the British online newspaper The Independent.

"This milestone is a difficult moment for the world but there are glimmers of hope that encourage us now and in the near future.

"No matter where a country is in an outbreak, it is never too late to turn things around."

Tedros outlined four essential steps to get the pandemic under control, starting with preventing amplifying events and protecting [vulnerable groups](#).

He stressed the need for individual responsibility in washing hands, wearing masks and keeping a distance; and for governments to find, isolate, test and care for cases, then trace and quarantine their contacts.

"While today's milestone gives us pause for reflection, this is a moment for us all to come together, in solidarity, to fight back against this virus," Tedros said.

"History will judge us on the decisions we do and don't make in the months ahead. Let's seize the opportunity and bridge national boundaries to save lives and livelihoods."

'One million tragedies'

Tedros picked out certain countries for praise, notably Thailand, Italy, Uruguay and Pakistan for their handling of the pandemic.

He reiterated his call for funding for the WHO-led ACT-Accelerator, a globally-pooled hunt for COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and treatments.

The programme has just \$3 billion of the \$38 billion needed to meet the goal of producing and delivering two billion vaccine doses, 245 million treatments and 500 million [diagnostic tests](#) over the next year.

Meanwhile the Red Cross, also based in Geneva, said the [death toll](#) was one more tragic [milestone](#) in the rolling humanitarian catastrophe.

"Today, we stand in grim solidarity with the hundreds of thousands of families that have lost loved ones," said Jagan Chapagain, secretary general of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

"A million deaths represent one million individual tragedies and countless heartbreaks."

He added that while fighting the pandemic, "we need to be planning for the support that millions of people will need to rebuild their lives even once this illness is finally defeated".

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