

# World remains unprepared to face new pandemics: panel

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Global reform efforts to better ward off new pandemic threats have been slow and fragmented, leaving the world as unprepared as when COVID-19 first surfaced, a report warned Wednesday.

A year ago, an independent expert panel presented a damning report to the World Health Organization's main annual assembly complaining that poor coordination and bad decisions had allowed the COVID pandemic to swell to such a catastrophic scale.

At the time, the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response, co-chaired by former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark and former Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, drew up a long list of measures needed to overcome COVID and ensure the world is better prepared to face future threats.

But in an assessment report one year on, the no longer active panel cautioned that the world was still "tinkering" and its inaction was laying "the groundwork for another pandemic".

"We largely have the very same tools and the same system that existed in December 2019 to respond to a pandemic threat," Clark told reporters.

"Those tools were not good enough."

All was not bleak. Clark hailed that the "transformative work required at the global level to prevent the next pandemic has begun."

She pointed to how new mechanisms set up after COVID surfaced had made it possible to deliver around 1.5 billion [vaccine doses](#) to [poorer countries](#), and praised the efforts under way to diversify production of vaccines and antivirals.

Agreement is also expected towards more secure and flexible funding for WHO, while plans for a dedicated pandemic fund are taking shape.

Changes to the International Health Regulations are being considered, and negotiations are under way towards a new "legal instrument"—like a

treaty or other form of agreement—aimed at streamlining the global approach to [pandemic preparedness](#) and response.

## **'No time for complacency'**

But Clark warned that these changes were all moving at a glacial pace, with the WHO budget change, for instance, not expected to be fully implemented for nearly a decade.

"At its current pace, an effective system is still years away, when a pandemic threat could occur at any time," she said.

"If there were a new pandemic threat this year, next year, or the year after, at least, we will be largely in the same place as we were in December 2019."

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic is still raging.

Clark pointed out that since the panel presented its [report](#) a year ago, 2.8 million more COVID deaths have been officially recorded, and that this "is clearly an undercount by many millions of people."

"Unfortunately, as much as we would all wish it to be the case, the pandemic isn't over," Clark said, complaining that "the political resolve to combat more waves of COVID-19 is waning."

"This is no time for complacency."

Joanne Liu, a doctor and former panel member who previously headed the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) charity, criticized the failures to ensure equitable access to vaccines and other tools needed to end the pandemic.

"More than a year and a half after we have made the amazing discovery of a vaccine, more than 2.8 billion people on this planet are still waiting for a first shot," she told reporters, slamming the inequity seen in the [pandemic](#) response as "a collective moral stain in our history."

"We can do better."

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