

Pandemic agreement would not infringe state sovereignty: WHO

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A global agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, which is still in negotiation, would not encroach on state sovereignty, the World Health Organization insisted Tuesday.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO member countries have spent more than two years thrashing out an accord to ensure a repeat worldwide health disaster could never happen again.

However, the [negotiation](#) process has been continually extended as countries are struggling to find common ground in key areas, particularly on sharing data on problematic pathogens, and then sharing the benefits derived from them, such as vaccines and medicines.

Claims have circulated in several countries in recent weeks—notably Britain, the United States and Switzerland—that the text could undermine state sovereignty in health matters.

"For those out there who speak about this being in some way a breach of national sovereignty, in fact, this kind of work that we do together is... an absolute expression and definition of your sovereignty," WHO emergencies director Michael Ryan told a press conference from the UN health agency's headquarters in Geneva.

"To be truly sovereign means to engage with others confidently, confident in your own independence.

"That is when you reach out and work with others on issues of common concern, and that's exactly what's happening downstairs."

The bureau steering the negotiations must report on progress to the World Health Assembly, the annual gathering of WHO member states, which runs from May 27 to June 1. The assembly is the WHO's decision-making body.

The pandemic agreement negotiations are set to go on until Friday and the assembly will decide what to do next, depending on whether the negotiators agree a finalized text or not.

"The [pandemic](#) agreement remains our best shot and, indeed, our generational opportunity at making sure next time a virus hits, we have a plan to get critical health tools to people quickly, effectively, and fairly," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at the press conference.

"It will save lives, and I'm asking country leaders to give it one last big push to get it over the line."

Ryan said the talks were making progress and "the determination of all of the participants is very high".

"There are clearly some key areas in which the member states still have some distance between them," he added, saying they included pathogen access and benefit-sharing, financing, prevention, and vaccines.

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