

Saturday, 1 February 2020, series of briefings and debates  
Civil society perspectives on selected global health topics



## Session 3, 14.15-15.45 hrs Public Health Emergencies

### Discussing health emergencies in times of an imminent emergency

One of the ambitious tasks of the current WHO strategy (GPW13) is that “one billion more people are better protected from health emergencies”. Item 15 of the EB agenda includes five subtopics related to health emergencies. But, for sure, this will not be just a “technical” agenda item of the upcoming EB session. The great attention given by national health authorities and the broad public to the emerging novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV), and how the matter is dealt with by WHO, is another (unwanted) test case to see if the set of global/international policies, regulations, mechanisms and guidelines (some of them being dealt with by the EB) is fit for purpose, and if health systems in rich and poor countries are properly equipped for both health emergency preparedness and response.

While the Coronavirus case will be in the focus of the EB delegates’ attention within and beyond the EB agenda, there are other issues that deserve this attention, too. The report of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (EB146/16) states that “WHO has made a great deal of progress in outbreak management”, but it also highlights some persisting challenges in dealing with health emergencies. And there are neglected root causes of health emergencies and, due to the lack of funding, the effectiveness and efficiency of the WHO Health Emergency programme remain limited.

### Time for WHO to declare the climate crisis a public health emergency of international concern?

In a session at the civil society meeting in May, we asked “Who cares about/for Planetary Health?” Since then, the debate on the climate emergency has risen to international prominence. At the same time, and despite the adoption of a “WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change”, the World Health Organization and its member states have yet to enact and implement policies that demonstrate concern for planetary health, with the urgency and dedication needed. Is it time for WHO to declare the climate crisis a public health emergency of international concern?

#### Speakers and panellists

- Michael Ryan, WHO Health Emergencies Programme
- Jennifer Kay Lacy-Nichols, People’s Health Movement
- Remco van de Pas, ITM Antwerp

Moderator: Thomas Schwarz

This session is dedicated to Peter Salama (1969-2020)

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for more democratic global health governance.”