

24 May 2021 - Seul le prononcé fait foi

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Message from French Président Emmanuel Macron of the 74th World Health Assembly.

Heads of State and Government,

Director-General of the World Health Organization, dear Tedros,

The pandemic isn't over, but we can already draw some lessons from it together. For more than a year now, we have all been fully committed to the daily management of this crisis. The time has come to draw lessons from it, and this discussion provides us the opportunity to do so.

The first lesson we may learn from this crisis, is that we can only succeed together. No country can save the world alone, and no country can save itself alone. Every one of our citizens knows that this pandemic is global by nature. Global through the mechanisms of contamination, and in our responses.

The response, therefore, can only be multilateral - meaning the one international, cooperative response that connects the various levels, guided by the principle of subsidiarity.

At the national level, sovereign decisions and the organization of healthcare, which involves massive investment across all health systems;

At the regional level, decisive action in research, investment and planning – to do this, we established the EU4Health, and we will continue to strengthen it;

At the international level, coordination, monitoring and information-sharing, and solidarity.

On this last aspect, with our European partners, we put forward tangible proposals:

Firstly, we must have institutions that measure up to our ambitions. The World Health Organization (WHO) must be the heart of global health, acting as a compass.

The WHO must be robust in times of crisis, agile enough to respond in an emergency, resistant against pandemics, totally transparent to inspire trust, with clear and transparent governance to ensure it never comes under diplomatic pressure and cannot be suspected of being under any pressure of this kind. France supports the strengthening of the WHO in its normative role and in the preparations for and responses to future health crises. In this respect, we must improve the financing of the WHO, so that it is more sustainable, predictable and less dependent on a few large donors.

We must also study proposals on the table today to significantly enhance the Organization's independence and authority.

Secondly, we must work collectively to strengthen the implementation of the International Health Regulations.

To this end, I wanted France to take part in a peer-reviewed pilot phase of the Member States' preparedness for pandemics. We must also give the WHO the possibility, through rapid response missions, to be present in the field as soon as the first signs of an epidemic appear.

I support the proposal to assign the WHO competence to conduct investigations on potential pandemic pathogens, which would give it swift access to all areas concerned. Transparency and data-sharing are absolutely essential.

Thirdly, the health crisis has reminded us that human health is inextricably linked to animal and environmental health. The famous "One Health" approach must guide our efforts to be better prepared for future pandemics. In this area, we have started to make progress. We launched it together in November 2020 in Paris. We must continue to design, develop and make this initiative a reality.

Lastly, and this topic is particularly important to me, the current pandemic, and all the disinformation that arose from it, has helped us to see the importance of science and robust health systems. Access to scientific data and reliable information, and informing the public and healthcare workers are essential to the current fight against the pandemic. They will be just as important when we come up against other major struggles in the years and decades to come.

That is why, in June 2019, we initiated the project for an Academy, alongside the World Health Organization, which would provide training on global health challenges for public leaders, business leaders and the lifeblood of global civil society.

Because healthcare, when founded on science, concerns us all.

Two years later, I am very pleased to announce, with you dear Doctor Tedros, that the World Health Academy has been launched.

France is committed to investing more than €120 million. It will become the leading global training structure in the area of public health. It will open in Lyon in 2023, but an initial catalogue of online courses will be available this summer.

France will fully participate in the upcoming negotiations on the reform of global health. To make rapid progress following this Assembly, the adoption of the resolution put forward by the European Union on the strengthening of the WHO's action in emergency health situations would send a strong first signal.

Likewise, I encourage you to approve the commencement of negotiations on the international treaty on pandemics.

We are moving forward, and we must.

Those are my few words, the few beliefs I wanted to share with you, dear Tedros, dear all.

Rest assured of France's full commitment. Today and tomorrow.

Thank you.