

Great Decisions 2021

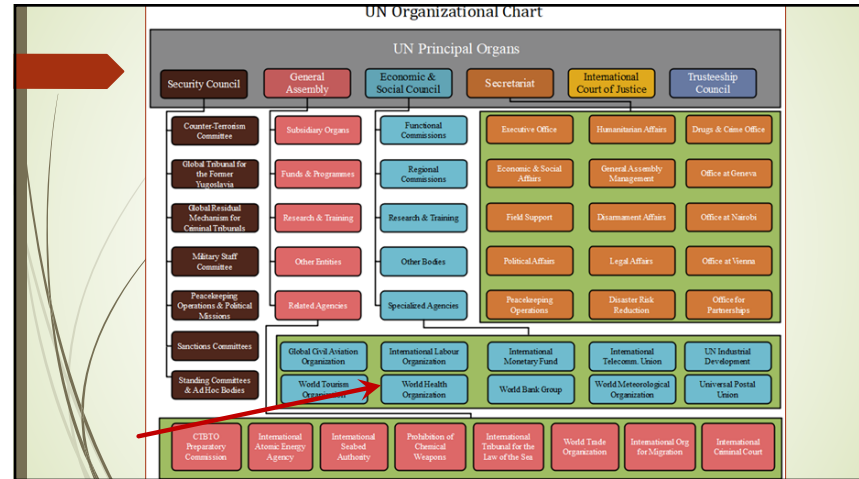
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CHAPTER 7

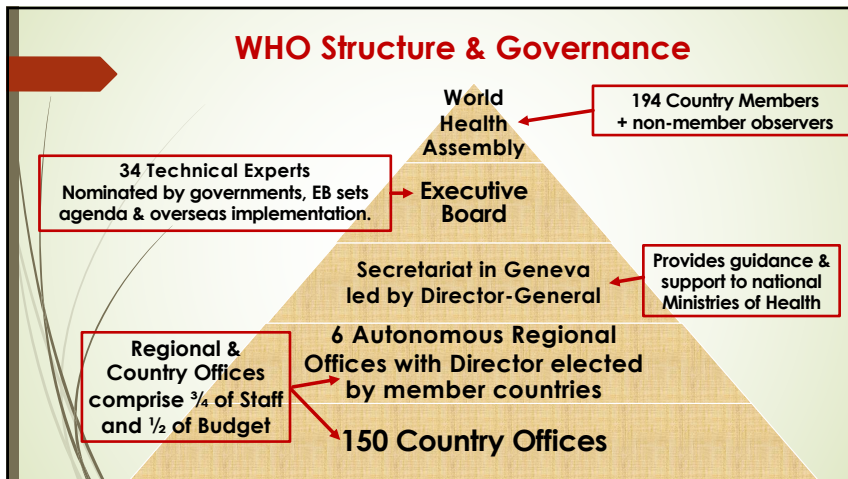
Role of the WHO



1



2



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WHO Mandate

- **Assemble Expertise** – Global hub for gathering, analyzing, and disseminating health data and advice.
- **Set Agenda/Focus International Attention** – (e.g. importance of female education for health & health care as a human right) and alert members of Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEICs)
- **Coordinate & Convene** – Bringing governments, civil society, philanthropists, and others together to shape policy & act in concert
- **Political Forum** – As governments seek to advance their interests (e.g. Ebola in Africa)

4

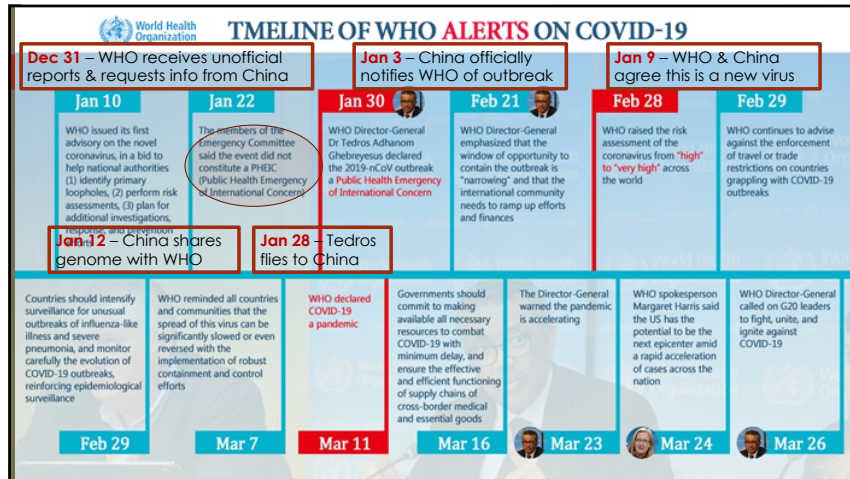


5

Lessons from SARS Outbreak

- 2003 – As unofficial news of a new contagion was killing people in China, Chinese government issued denials of information and access. Despite WHO authority limited by International Health Regulations (IHR) to cholera, plague, and yellow fever, WHO leaders launched a “naming and shaming” campaign to force China to own up.
- 2005 – IHRs amended to authorize such “SARS shaming” when governments are non-compliant, yet avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade
- PHEICs ISSUED 6 times:**
 - 2009 – H1N1
 - 2014 – Polio
 - 2014 – Ebola
 - 2015 – Zika
 - 2018 – Ebola
 - 2020 - COVID

6



7

Assessment of WHO's Covid Response

- Information Sharing** - Data dashboard on case counts, near-daily press briefings largely appreciated
- Technical Guidance** – Mixed reviews; Experts seen as:
 - Slow in determining method of transmission
 - Slow in advising mask-wearing for fear of giving false sense of security and thus not follow social distancing & washing
- Assistance to Global South** – WHO appeals to members for funding for crucial medical equipment & diagnostics fell far short, thus appeals to individuals → \$233 mil (\$55 mil from Lady Gaga)
- Coordination** - Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT) to speed up research & treatment tools; COVAX for production & distribution of vaccines (pooled procurement mechanism). Coordination requires players to be willing to be directed.

8

Potential for WHO Reform

Revising the International Health Regulation (IHR) – First time members have considered since SARS.

- ▶ **More Carrots & Sticks** - to ensure compliance
- ▶ **More/Stable Financing** – to empower authority
- ▶ **PHEIC Designation More Nuanced** – not binary decision
- ▶ **IAEA-like Investigative Teams & WTO-like Enforcement Mechanisms**
- ▶ **Augment Emergency Committee with Economic & Political Expertise**

Governments get what they ask/pay for, not what they need!

9

Critics of the WHO Covid Response

Politics of Blame – To deflect blame for domestic failures, Donald Trump and administration allies blamed WHO:

- ▶ For failing to warn the world early enough
- ▶ And its Director-General for being too “China-centric”

Expert's Analysis – Covid response revealed problems:

- ▶ WHO has been drained of power and resources
- ▶ Left timid and unable to exercise authority to compel China to share information or other governments to act earlier
- ▶ Member states get what they pay for/order, not what they need

10