



EU Statement on the WHO-led COVID-19 origins study

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Statements on behalf of the EU

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the EU and its Member States, while implementing relevant public health measures at the national level, have been a driving force for the mobilization of the international community to support WHO's leadership role in the health response to the pandemic, which remains the global priority.

In Resolution WHA73.1 on the COVID-19 response, Member States agreed on the need for further work to study the origins of the virus and its route of introduction to the human population, including through scientific and collaborative field missions and through WHO's close cooperation with the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and countries, in line with a One Health Approach, which will enable targeted interventions and a research agenda to reduce the risk of similar events occurring.

Only through a thorough review of the origins of the virus and its transmission into the human population, will we be able to better understand and control this pandemic, and to better prevent and prepare for future health emergencies. Hence, we express our support for a science-based, transparent and independent WHO-convened Global Study of the Origins of SARS-CoV-2, where timely access to data and field missions play a critical role.

While regretting the late start of the study, the delayed deployment of the experts and the limited availability of early samples and related data, we consider the work carried out to date and the report released today as a helpful first step. We are looking forward to further engagement with the Secretariat and the experts on the content of the report as well as on the implementation of its recommendations.

As outlined in the report, further work will have to be pursued to understand the origin of SARS-CoV-2 and its introduction into the human population. This will require further and timely access to all relevant locations and to all relevant human, animal and environmental data available, including data from the first identified COVID-19 cases and cases picked up by surveillance systems, as well as further serologic testing of blood samples.

We request the WHO to continue the studies and present a clear timeline for the follow-up work, and we wish to be regularly briefed on plans for, and progress of, its next phases. We also request that the DG allocate the resources necessary to complete this work. We encourage full collaboration and continued support of all relevant authorities regarding the next steps of the study. We are hopeful that such an approach will help us in our common efforts and that any gaps in data needed to further the investigation can be addressed.

Global health is a common responsibility for all WHO Member States. Every lack or delay in sharing public health information can have worldwide adverse impact and we call on all Member States to continue sharing public health information with WHO as soon as it is available, in order to better inform and drive responses. The identification of the source of the SARS-CoV-2 virus will require full and transparent cooperation by all WHO Member States and a collaborative effort by scientists from various disciplines. Open scientific debate is crucial to reach a high standard of conclusions. For these reasons, the EU and its Member States encourage the WHO to facilitate and support further engagement of the international scientific community in this regard.

EU will continue to support the strengthening of international preparedness and the response to pandemics, including through universal and equitable access to diagnostics, treatments and vaccines. A better understanding of the virus, including its origins, is also essential in that respect. Ultimately, pandemic preparedness is not only about response capacities; it is above all about how countries act when a threat arises.

We remain fully committed to working together with all countries and the international community on ways to enhance the organization of field missions in the context of COVID-19 and for future global health emergencies, in order to ensure the rapid start of origins' studies, timely deployment of field missions, independence of the work of the experts and transparency of communication with Member States.

Tags:

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