The WHO: Sick with the UN’s corruption virus – opinion

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Like most UN institutions today, the World Health Organization is struggling with corruption and incompetence. While the values and aims of the United Nations are noble, and the purpose of the WHO is important, the organization has proven its abject failure and should be held accountable.

US President Donald Trump is right to defund the WHO, and other major donors should follow suit, not only with the WHO but with other UN agencies as well, until such time as these bodies can create a methodology that limits the corruption and lack of accountability we see today.

Before the coronavirus pandemic exploded, cases were rapidly expanding in China as early as late November. Yet China reported to the WHO about the unusual virus only on December 31, after covering up what was occurring, and even punishing whistleblowers who spoke out about the novel virus. Additionally, Taiwan reported human-to-human transmission of the virus to the WHO on December 31, yet the WHO hid this information from the public.

When the WHO and CDC first offered to assist with the virus, China refused, which should have been the indicator something was wrong. Yet even after that, the WHO’s response was shockingly awful, with a tweet regurgitating Chinese Communist Party propaganda on January 14 stating there was "no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission” in China. Only days later, China admitted the virus was highly contagious and transmissible by human-to-human contact. Still, the WHO failed to act until January 30, when it finally declared a public emergency.

Throughout February, China harshly criticized many states, Israel and the United States included, for restrictive travel bans on flights from China. Instead of acting in the interest of public health, the WHO backed China and opposed travel bans.

WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated in February that there was “no need” for measures that “unnecessarily interfere with international travel and trade.” Tedros even praised China’s efforts to contain the virus, calling it an “amazing achievement” and said “the chances of getting this going to anywhere outside China is very low."

In nearly every step of the way, the WHO has been wrong, and has doubled down on defending China. Incredibly, the WHO supported China opening wet markets in mid-April, despite it being a possible origin of COVID-19.

Either the WHO is complicit, or incompetent – and neither is acceptable for the amount of money it receives to fulfill its mandate, or for the importance of their mission.

BEYOND CORONAVIRUS, failure is nothing new for the WHO. In 2014, the WHO completely mismanaged the Ebola outbreak in a spectacular failure that cost over 11,000 lives. Renowned experts around the world condemned the WHO’s failure to respond to Ebola for months into the outbreak. Only three months into Ebola did the WHO declare an emergency.

Despite the fact that the WHO is primarily funded by the US to the tune of $500 million a year (until recently), it was the largely the private sector and the US which stepped up to put an end to Ebola.

The WHO’s failures don’t stop at the practical. The organization has repeatedly proven itself to be a political actor that behaves in bad faith toward other countries – in particular, those countries which China doesn’t like. The WHO has excluded Taiwan from its World Health Assembly for the last three years, and banned Taiwan from an emergency WHO conference on coronavirus this year. The irony of this is, of course, that Taiwan is one of the few places where the COVID-19 response has proven extremely effective.

In an interview with a Hong Kong journalist, WHO representative Dr. Bruce Aylward was awkwardly “disconnected” from the reporter when he was asked to comment on Taiwan’s response to the virus, after first acting as if he didn’t initially hear the question, and then asking to move to the next line of inquiry. When he was reconnected with the reporter, he again refused to answer, in a painfully awkward exchange that perhaps demonstrates the true agenda of the WHO: toeing the line for the Chinese Communist Party.

Of course, it wouldn’t be a UN agency if it wasn’t obsessed with Israel in some capacity. The World Health Assembly, which is the WHO’s policymaking body, has only one item on its permanent agenda directed at a specific country.

You might think that the country would be China, given the high number of infectious diseases which come from that country, but you’d be wrong. It’s Israel.

Not only that, but last year the only report adopted by the assembly which targeted a single country was, of course, aimed at Israel. This disproportionate focus once again demonstrates the misguided and politically loaded agenda of the WHO today.

It’s been proven multiple times, and at a very high cost to human life, that the WHO can’t adequately respond, educate or assist in the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases. It is a pity that the organization with such an honorable mission, the organization which initially made tremendous achievements such as the eradication of smallpox, has fallen so deeply into politicking around the world.

After the Ebola outbreak, experts around the world talked about the need for the WHO to reform. But here we are in 2020 and the same thing is happening. Perhaps the only way to make meaningful change in the WHO is to demand change with more than just talk. Cutting $500 million might just be a good start.