



April 20, 2020

Sen. Lindsey Graham  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Sen. Patrick Leahy  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Appropriations  
State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee  
Room S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Rep. Nita M. Lowey  
Chairwoman  
House Committee on Appropriations  
State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee  
HT-2, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Hal Rogers  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations  
State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee  
HT-2, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: White House decision to halt funding to the World Health Organizations**

Dear Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Rogers:

On behalf of Amnesty International USA, I am writing to express our serious concerns over President Trump’s decision to cut off funding to the World Health Organization (“WHO”) pending a two-month review of WHO’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amnesty International is a global movement dedicated to defending and protecting human rights worldwide. Since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, Amnesty International has focused on documenting the responses of governments around the world that imperil fundamental freedoms, including policies instituted under public health emergency measures.

The [WHO’s Constitution](#) acknowledges that “[t]he enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.” The right to health is contained in several international human rights instruments including Article 12 of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#); Article 24 of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#); and Article 12 of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#). The right to health includes the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas concerning health issues, and the “prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases.”

President Trump’s decision to cease the transfer of money duly appropriated by Congress risks undermining the WHO’s global efforts to control and contain an unprecedented pandemic and imperils lives in the U.S. and around the world. The middle of a deadly pandemic is not the time to defund and undermine a humanitarian organization on the front line of saving lives.

The WHO is the only international body with a mandate to support global public health. The U.S. is by far the single largest contributor to the WHO.

Because much of the WHO's [activities and resources are concentrated](#) across economically fragile regions of the world, the White House's decision will have a disproportionate impact on countries with weaker health systems. Because an outbreak anywhere can lead to transmission everywhere including the U.S., U.S. allies including the [United Kingdom](#) have recently increased funding for the WHO.

Although the President announced that funding would be frozen to the WHO pending a two-month review, the White House has failed to provide any meaningful details further to the nature of that review. The White House has provided no clarification regarding how that review would be conducted, who would conduct and whether the review's findings would be released to the public. In announcing the review, [the President said](#) it would look at the WHO's "role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of coronavirus." Given the tone of this statement, it's unlikely that the review will be a genuine meaningful review.

No international body, including the WHO, should be beyond scrutiny. It is legitimate and important to scrutinize an organization's effectiveness and impartiality or to engage in a collaborative, good-faith effort at institutional reform. In particular, once the pandemic recedes, it will be important to ask questions about China's censorship of scientists and activists who were trying to sound the alarm. However, the cuts proposed by President Trump accomplish none of these reform goals and merely amount to a draconian punishment of vulnerable communities and nations at a time of unprecedented global crisis. The decision is made more puzzling by the fact that [administration officials](#) are on record as recently as two weeks ago highlighting U.S. contributions to the WHO. As such, this radical reversal in policy only serves to politicize the pandemic at a time when a united, coordinated global response is more needed than ever.

We urge the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations to call on the White House to:

- Clarify under what authority it proposes to freeze congressionally appropriated funds to the WHO;
- Clarify all relevant details, including criteria for evaluation, regarding its proposed two-month review process; and
- Urgently unfreeze payments to the WHO.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at [jlin@aiusa.org](mailto:jlin@aiusa.org) or 202/281-0017.

Sincerely,



Joanne Lin

National Director, Advocacy and Government Affairs