



Statement by Ambassador Khalil Hashmi, Permanent Representative at World Health Assembly Special Session, “*Consideration of the benefits of developing a WHO convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic preparedness and response*” on 29 November 2021

**Madam President,
Director General WHO
Excellencies,**

The manifestations and consequences of COVID-19 pandemic have been both wide ranging and devastating. With nearly 240 million cases and 5 million deaths, the scale of human suffering caused by this deadly virus is unprecedented.

While the virus has impacted every country, the poorest and vulnerable have been hit the hardest, within and among countries. One of the most visible illustrations of these varied impacts is the COVID vaccines divide between the developed and developing countries.

The pandemic has also exposed the fragilities of and gaps in the existing global health security architecture: its governance, its legal framework and how challenges of resource and capacity constraints have impeded enforcement.

This special session is therefore significant in charting a path, hopefully, towards a robust, resilient, equitable and effective international response to prevent, prepare for and respond to future pandemics.

We are pleased to have co-sponsored the draft decision before this Assembly.

Madam President,

The establishment of an intergovernmental negotiating body is a welcome first step in shaping a global response to a global challenge.

The draft decision rightly emphasizes the need to address the existing gaps in global health emergency system and the inequity embedded in access to medical countermeasures. The development of a new instrument, based on the principles of solidarity and equity, would represent a good start.

It remains to be seen how the INB process identifies and evolves agreement on the substantive elements of a future instrument or framework. We look forward to participating and contributing to its deliberations.

Madam President,

Given the pace, nature and quality of international response to the present pandemic, developing a future instrument would arguably be a daunting task. As Director General Tedros underscored this morning, “ the ability to end COVID-19 is a test of our ability to prevent and respond to future pandemics”.

We share the concerns outlined by DG WHO that the lack of sharing of COVID-19 related medical countermeasures has hindered the collective ability to prevent infections and save lives.

We therefore urge countries opposing a TRIPS waiver at the WTO to revisit their positions, sooner than later. We also call upon these countries to align their support for a future instrument to a TRIPS waiver as well. The gap between the two approaches must be bridged, to save lives now and in the future.

We would like also outline some of the essential elements that should be incorporated into a future instrument or a framework.

First, the instrument must have an organic co-relation between its principles, objectives, tools and means of implementation. Lessons learnt from the COVID_19 pandemic and experiences gained from the implementation of IHR should be the principal driver of the future instrument. Meaningfully addressing the gaps in the required core capacities and overcoming systemic deficiencies in the existing IHR would be critical.

Second, the instrument must prioritize the principle of equity and public interest over other considerations in times of global health emergency.

Third, it should strike a prudent balance between rights and obligations of states, considering the varied level of development, responsibilities and capacities.

Four, it should incorporate sustainable and adequate financing mechanism and assess the compatibility the existing governance and financing model of the WHO with future instrument.

The enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being. Let us re-affirm our commitment to a fully equipped and adequately resourced global health security architecture that responds effectively to future pandemics and contributes to the achievement of the goal of universal health coverage by the end of this decade.
