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April 9, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General
World Health Organization
Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Dr. Ghebreyesus,

It's clear that the World Health Organization (WHO) is facing an unprecedented crisis confronting the novel coronavirus pandemic. The task of coordinating a global response to a pandemic is certainly a challenging one. However, as the global leader in public health, working "worldwide to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable,"¹ WHO has an obligation to keep citizens of all countries well equipped with accurate and timely information, particularly in the face of a global health crisis. Unfortunately, there is ample reason to question WHO's response to early signs of this outbreak in China. The lack of independent analysis and advice in the face of initial misleading public messaging from China has resulted in several countries scrambling to make up for lost time.

According to public reporting, starting in early January, China began to downplay the pandemic.² Reports from the U.S. Intelligence Community further state that China has been concealing the extent of the coronavirus outbreak in its country—specifically, that China has been lying about both its total number of cases as well as the number of deaths of its citizens due to the virus.³ This reporting raises the question as to whether WHO had reason to believe that the information China was providing was inaccurate, and whether due to its reliance on incorrect, unverifiable information, WHO was slow to raise the global alarm about the outbreak. It is

¹ World Health Organization, *What We Do* (last visited Apr. 8, 2020), <https://www.who.int/about/what-we-do>.

² See Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, *Timeline: The early days of China's coronavirus outbreak and cover-up*, AXIOS (Mar. 18, 2020), <https://www.axios.com/timeline-the-early-days-of-chinas-coronavirus-outbreak-and-cover-up-ee65211a-afb6-4641-97b8-353718a5faab.html>; see also Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala, and Lena H. Sun, *Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Feb. 1, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/>.

³ See Nick Wadhams and Jennifer Jacobs, *China Concealed Extent of Virus Outbreak, U.S. Intelligence Says*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 1, 2020), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-01/china-concealed-extent-of-virus-outbreak-u-s-intelligence-says>.

WHO's responsibility to act in an independent manner on behalf of the entire world by seeking accurate, impartial information and assessing all information from governments for reliability when advising member countries of possible outbreaks.

Chinese doctors reportedly had found evidence of a new virus similar to SARS in December, but doctors have reported being threatened by the Chinese Government to not talk publicly about these findings.⁴ WHO began publicly releasing information on the coronavirus pandemic on January 14, 2020, when WHO tweeted that “[p]reliminary investigations conducted by the Chinese authorities have found no clear evidence of human-to-human transmission of the novel [coronavirus] (2019-nCoV) identified in [Wuhan, China].”⁵ However, on January 20, 2020, a Chinese doctor announced that the virus could, in fact, be transmitted human-to-human.⁶ Starting on January 25, 2020, China began an extended lockdown in Wuhan to stop the rapid spread of the virus.⁷ The number of confirmed cases in China exploded from January 20, 2020 to February 1, 2020 growing from just 220 confirmed cases to almost 14,000.⁸ On January 29, 2020, you appeared to praise China's efforts to contain the virus in a statement, saying China's efforts “have been essential for preventing the further spread of the virus.”⁹ By that time, the virus had already started to spread rapidly across the globe, including to the United States. On March 11, 2020, WHO officially declared the novel coronavirus a global pandemic.¹⁰ But as you stated on March 25, 2020, unfortunately, “the time to act was actually a month ago, two months ago. . .”¹¹ China has stated that their number of cases peaked at roughly 82,000, with only 3,300 deaths; however photos of the Wuhan province have shown stacks of urns outside of funeral homes, which further bolsters the U.S. Intelligence Community's assertion that China is deliberately spreading false information in an attempt to downplay the pandemic in China.¹²

⁴ See Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, *Timeline: The early days of China's coronavirus outbreak and cover-up*, AXIOS (Mar. 18, 2020), <https://www.axios.com/timeline-the-early-days-of-chinas-coronavirus-outbreak-and-cover-up-ee65211a-afb6-4641-97b8-353718a5faab.html>.

⁵ World Health Organization (WHO) (@WHO), TWITTER (Jan. 14, 2020, 6:18 AM), <https://twitter.com/WHO/status/1217043229427761152?s=20>.

⁶ See Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, *Timeline: The early days of China's coronavirus outbreak and cover-up*, AXIOS (Mar. 18, 2020), <https://www.axios.com/timeline-the-early-days-of-chinas-coronavirus-outbreak-and-cover-up-ee65211a-afb6-4641-97b8-353718a5faab.html>.

⁷ See *Id.*

⁸ See Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala, and Lena H. Sun, *Early missteps and state secrecy in China probably allowed the coronavirus to spread farther and faster*, THE WASHINGTON POST (Feb. 1, 2020), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/02/01/early-missteps-state-secrecy-china-likely-allowed-coronavirus-spread-farther-faster/>.

⁹ See World Health Organization, *Press Briefing on WHO Mission to China and Novel Coronavirus Outbreak* (Jan. 29, 2020), <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/press-briefing-on-who-mission-to-china-and-novel-coronavirus-outbreak>.

¹⁰ See World Health Organization, WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020 (Mar. 11, 2020), <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19--11-march-2020>.

¹¹ See Jacqueline Howard, WHO official: "The time to act was actually a month ago", CNN (Mar. 25, 2020), https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/coronavirus-outbreak-03-25-20-intl-hnk/h_80f81b60af4241d373f7a9a3f837ef89.

¹² See Nick Wadhams and Jennifer Jacobs, *China Concealed Extent of Virus Outbreak, U.S. Intelligence Says*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 1, 2020), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-01/china-concealed-extent-of-virus-outbreak-u-s-intelligence-says>; see also Sharon Chen, Dandan Li, and Claire Che, *Urn in Wuhan Prompt New Questions of Virus's Toll*, Bloomberg (Mar. 27, 2020), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-27/stacks-of-urns-in-wuhan-prompt-new-questions-of-virus-s-toll>.

China's coronavirus messaging and misinformation campaign has had a detrimental impact on the global community, and a clear, direct impact on WHO's ability to stay ahead of this pandemic. Debra Birx, State Department immunologist advising the White House, recently stated that China's public reporting on the coronavirus had influenced assumptions elsewhere in the world about the nature of the virus.¹³ China has further attempted to blame the U.S., with absolutely zero evidence, for the spread of the coronavirus.¹⁴ Rather than parroting Chinese propaganda and talking points, WHO should be making independent assessments. Like many of my colleagues in the United States Senate, I question Communist China's ability and willingness to coordinate in a transparent manner with international bodies when it comes to combating the threat of the coronavirus.

Additionally, numerous reports suggest that Taiwan has been largely shut out of global health discussions.¹⁵ On March 29, 2020, WHO elaborated on a recent interview in which a WHO official, Dr. Bruce Aylward, failed to respond to questions regarding Taiwan's participation in WHO meetings and information sharing.¹⁶ WHO stated that it is "working with all health authorities who are facing the current coronavirus pandemic, including Taiwanese health experts."¹⁷ However, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs disagreed, stating that WHO imposed "unfair restrictions" on Taiwan "based on political considerations."¹⁸ Taiwanese officials further reported that Taiwan cannot participate in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN), and currently does not have access to timely information through that system.¹⁹ Taiwan has been allowed to participate in WHO meetings in the past, with observer status, but as of 2016 Taiwan's requests to participate have all been denied due to political objections from Beijing.²⁰ While WHO includes Taiwan's statistics with those of China, Taiwan's responses to the coronavirus appear to have been completely different from China's and it is vital for public health decision-making that the data and information on

¹³ See Nick Wadhams and Jennifer Jacobs, *China Concealed Extent of Virus Outbreak, U.S. Intelligence Says*, BLOOMBERG (Apr. 1, 2020), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-01/china-concealed-extent-of-virus-outbreak-u-s-intelligence-says>.

¹⁴ See Steven Lee Myers, *China Spins Tale That the U.S. Army Started the Coronavirus Epidemic*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (Mar. 13, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/13/world/asia/coronavirus-china-conspiracy-theory.html>.

¹⁵ See Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *Taiwan Has Been Shut Out of Global Health Discussions. Its Participation Could Have Saved Lives*, TIME (Mar. 18, 2020), <https://time.com/5805629/coronavirus-taiwan/>; see also Central News Agency, *Taiwan urges WHO to review restrictions on its participation*, TAIWAN NEWS (Mar. 31, 2020), <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3907695>.

¹⁶ See Tim Hains, *Tucker Carlson: World Health Organization Is A Lapdog Of The Chinese Government*, REAL CLEAR POLITICS (Apr. 1, 2020), https://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2020/04/01/tucker_carlson_world_health_organization_is_a_lapdog_of_the_chinese_government.html; see also World Health Organization, *Information sharing on COVID-19* (Mar. 29, 2020), <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/29-03-2020-information-sharing-on-covid-19>.

¹⁷ World Health Organization, *Information sharing on COVID-19* (Mar. 29, 2020), <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/29-03-2020-information-sharing-on-covid-19>.

¹⁸ See Central News Agency, *Taiwan urges WHO to review restrictions on its participation*, TAIWAN NEWS (Mar. 31, 2020), <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3907695>.

¹⁹ See *Id.*

²⁰ Huileng Tan, *Taipei lashes out at China for blocking Taiwan's access to the World Health Organization*, CNBC (Feb. 6, 2020), <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/02/06/coronavirus-taiwan-lashes-out-at-china-for-blocking-who-access.html>.

Taiwan's public health practices be accurately disaggregated and made available to the world.²¹ According to reports, as of March 18, 2020, Taiwan had seen only 100 cases compared to the more than 80,000 in China.²²

Lastly, I am sure you are aware of Dr. Li Wenliang, in Wuhan, China, who raised the issue of a growing pandemic early on while the Communist Chinese government was denying and downplaying the outbreak.²³ Chinese officials punished and reprimanded Dr. Li for "spreading rumors" about the virus in early January.²⁴ Tragically, Dr. Li passed away in early February due to the coronavirus, and six weeks after Dr. Li's death, China apologized to his family and posthumously dropped the reprimand against Dr. Li.²⁵ Whistleblowers are instrumental in weeding out bad actors in government and ensuring necessary transparency, including those affecting matters of public health and safety. In the United States, we have strong whistleblower protections and I have spent the majority of my time in public office fighting for those individuals brave enough to step forward and shine light on government misdeeds. If WHO had more credible information or data that it did not act on in a timely fashion, that information could have proved crucial in the global fight to combat the coronavirus.

To that end, I respectfully request that you answer the following questions no later than May 1, 2020.

1. Was WHO acting on independently verified information when advising WHO members in January on the growing pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus?
2. At any point before WHO determined the novel coronavirus to be a global pandemic, was WHO contacted by any individual either within its organization or otherwise within China, regarding the seriousness of the virus which would have contradicted the information that the Chinese government was providing WHO? If so, did WHO act on this information?
3. At any point in late 2019, did any individual contact WHO with information regarding a concerning pneumonia-like outbreak in China? If so, did WHO act on this information?
4. Why does WHO count Taiwan's statistics with that of China's despite the two having entirely different governments, particularly entirely different public health infrastructure and policies?

²¹ See Anders Fogh Rasmussen, *Taiwan Has Been Shut Out of Global Health Discussions. Its Participation Could Have Saved Lives*, TIME (Mar. 18, 2020), <https://time.com/5805629/coronavirus-taiwan/>.

²² See *Id.*

²³ See Amy Cheng, *Chinese Authorities Admit Improper Response To Coronavirus Whistleblower*, NPR (Mar. 19, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/03/19/818295972/chinese-authorities-admit-improper-response-to-coronavirus-whistleblower>.

²⁴ See *Id.*

²⁵ See *Id.*

5. Will WHO separate out the data from Taiwan from that of China to better articulate how both Taiwan and China have independently combatted the spread of the novel coronavirus?
6. Does WHO plan to open up GOARN to those governments, like Taiwan, that do not hold official WHO member status so that they may receive up-to-date, real-time information from WHO?

The U.S. has been WHO's largest contributor since its creation in 1948, contributing more than \$400 million to WHO in 2019 alone.²⁶ As a U.S. Senator, I have an obligation to do my best to protect the health and well-being of U.S. citizens and to ensure proper oversight of U.S. monies contributed to international organizations. To that end, I urge you to work with the U.S. Government in its effort to combat the coronavirus pandemic by ensuring rapid and reliable information sharing from all possible sources and to conduct independent research as soon as possible to ensure the scientific integrity of the data for epidemiologists and other researchers.

I look forward to hearing from you as we work together to do everything possible to contain this pandemic and halt the spread of the novel coronavirus. Should you have any questions, please contact Quinton Brady or Angel Ventling of my staff at (202) 224-4515. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance

²⁶ Office of the Spokesperson, *The U.S. Role in International Organizations' Response to COVID-19*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, (Mar. 31, 2020), <https://www.state.gov/the-u-s-role-in-international-organizations-response-to-covid-19/>.