



Director-General's opening remarks at the launch of the Berlin Hub

5 May 2021

Your Excellency Jens Spahn, Federal Minister of Health,

Dear colleagues and friends,

Germany has been a steadfast partner to WHO for many years, but especially during the past year.

And I have personally appreciated the strong leadership of Her Excellency Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany.

In my first week as Director-General in 2017, I had the honour of attending the G20 Summit in Hamburg, where under Chancellor Merkel's leadership, Germany put a very strong emphasis on health and emergency preparedness, years before COVID-19.

As part of Germany's G20 presidency, Chancellor Merkel also initiated the first ever meeting of G20 health ministers, which included a health emergency simulation exercise.

In October last year I was honoured to speak to Chancellor Merkel, which is when we first discussed the idea for a new centre that would serve as a global platform to enhance global capacity for pandemic and epidemic intelligence.

Chancellor Merkel cannot be with us live, but we are delighted that she has recorded a video message for today's event.

[CHANCELLOR MERKEL'S VIDEO WAS PLAYED]

Once again, my deep gratitude to Chancellor Merkel for her leadership and partnership.

Of course, like every great leader, Chancellor Merkel is supported by a great team.

Even as he has led the response to COVID-19 at home, Germany's Federal Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, has played an essential leadership role on the global stage.

Jens, thank you so much once again for your leadership and partnership. You have the floor.

[MINISTER SPAHN ADDRESSED THE MEDIA]

Thank you so much, Minister Spahn, and please accept my deep personal appreciation for everything you have done over the past few years, and especially during the past difficult 12 months.

And we're very grateful for Germany's financial support for the WHO Hub, and for hosting it in Berlin, where it will benefit, as you said, from being in an innovative environment.

As Minister Spahn said, rapid and reliable information is essential in every area of health, but especially when it comes to preparing for, detecting and responding to epidemics and pandemics.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed gaps in the global systems for pandemic and epidemic intelligence.

And it's a fact of nature that more viruses will emerge with the potential of sparking epidemics or pandemics.

Viruses move fast, but data can move even faster. With the right information, countries and communities can stay one step ahead of an emerging risk, and save lives.

Modern technologies give us unprecedented tools for collecting, analysing and disseminating data in real time around the world.

That's what the WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence aims to do.

Hosted in Berlin, the WHO Hub will be a global centre that works with partners around the world to lead innovations in pandemic and epidemic intelligence, data, surveillance and analytics.

The WHO Hub will be part of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, and we expect it to play a vital role in the global health security ecosystem.

It builds on WHO's existing work through the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network and the Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources initiative, which scans online news sources for reports of public health threats.

Indeed, it was the EIOS system that picked up the first reports of a new virus in Wuhan, China, in the early hours of 31 December 2019.

Our aim is that the WHO Hub will take this work to the next level, generating better data and better analytics for better decision-making and a safer world.

Christian, back to you.

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