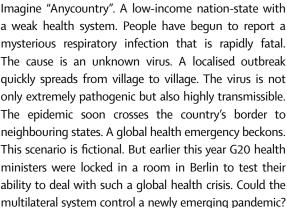
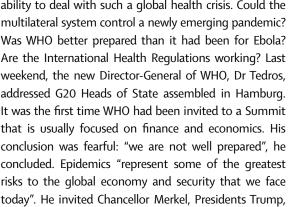
Offline: The G20 and health—platitudes and broken promises





Are the week address that conclusions in the conclusions of the conclu





recall past pandemics. Influenza in 1918: 50 million deaths. SARS: a US\$60 billion bill to be paid by the global economy. How big is the risk? WHO, he said, receives 3000 signals of potential epidemic outbreaks

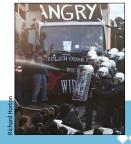
Xi, and Macron, Prime Minster May, and others to

every month. What if one of these outbreaks turned

out to be a virus of unprecedented pathogenicity and

transmissibility? With 3 billion airline travellers annually, the danger of a global catastrophe was all too real. No amount of wise economics or deft financing could protect the world from disaster. The solution? Universal health coverage as the first-line defence and a foundation for

global health security. He called for money, political commitment, a better understanding of country and global weaknesses that would permit an outbreak to take hold, and more research. Did his audience pay attention? Not nearly enough.



The 15-page final Declaration from G20 leaders was full of platitudes. The goal of the G20 is to deliver "strong, sustainable, balanced, and inclusive growth". Global health appeared on page 8. The G20 recognised

that their nations had a "crucial role" in pandemic preparedness. They agreed that strong health systems are important. They called on the UN to keep global health a priority. They stressed the need for cooperative action. The value of the health workforce. The importance of the International Health Regulations. Polio eradication got a mention. Migration too. "We support the WHO's central coordinating role", they said. They advocated more money for WHO's work. They called for national action plans to tackle antimicrobial resistance. And they suggested a new International Research and Development Collaboration Hub for product development. But these warm words were missing one thing—concrete and specific actions.

The G20 is a growing threat to global health. Let's give credit to Angela Merkel. Germany's Chancellor had made health a priority for her country's G20 Presidency. At last week's launch of The Lancet's Germany and Health Series in Berlin, Minister of State Helge Braun gave his government's full commitment to supporting and strengthening WHO. Merkel had specifically (and unusually) invited WHO's attendance. Why? Because she recognised that global health is the foundation of economic success, "a pivotal subject for the G20". But there was no substance to her words. Planning for this disappointing result began last December. A Health Working Group convened in March, 2017, and health ministers gathered for their crisis simulation in May. Their concerns coalesced around the risks of dangerous pathogens. But their promises proved empty. G20 leaders enjoyed a spectacular evening in Hamburg last weekend listening to Beethoven's Ode to Joy, the European Union's anthem. The "Ode" was based on a poem written in 1785 by a physician—Friedrich Schiller. "You millions, I embrace you", wrote Schiller. A poetic rendition of universal health coverage? Not quite. The G20 is an exclusive group of nations accounting for three-quarters of global trade. Their first and only concern is economic growth. For the first time, a G20 Presidency had placed global health at the centre of the group's discussions. What an opportunity. They flunked it.

Richard Horton richard.horton@lancet.com

Reproduced with permission of copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

