**Title: Pandemics; Overlooked Crises - A Call to Action**

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When it first reared its ugly and grotesque head towards the end of 2019 in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province in China, most people thought it would meet a quick and nondramatic end due to global advancement in medical sciences. However, coronavirus gradually spread across the globe, gaining notoriety, bringing deaths and bereavement to families, weakening the global economy and changing the norm.

Coronavirus, later referred to as COVID-19 (where CO stands for corona, VI for virus, D for disease and 19, the year it appeared on the global stage – 2019), is a disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus known as SARS-COV-2 that had not been previously identified by humans. The World Health Organisation (WHO) first reported the emergence of the disease on the 31st of December, 2019.

The coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), but COVID-19 with its different variances and strains.

It, however, became a global concern when on 11th March, 2020, WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declared the then novel coronavirus outbreak a pandemic. Quoting Dr. Ghebreyesus during the WHO briefing, “WHO is deeply concerned both by the alarming levels of spread and severity and by the alarming levels of inaction by some countries.”

At that time, the disease had spread from China to several countries, including the United States, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, and most European nations. Nigeria had earlier, on the 27th of February, 2020, confirmed its first COVID-19 case in the West African nation, revealing that it was brought into the State by an Italian national from Milan.

According to a medical dictionary, a pandemic is "an epidemic occurring on a scale that crosses international boundaries, usually affecting people on a worldwide scale". What makes the disease a pandemic is not just because it is widespread or causes monumental loss of lives, but because it is also infectious, contagious or easily transmissible.

It took precisely one hundred years between the last known pandemic and COVID-19 19 which ravaged lives and threatened to usher in a new era. The 1918 Spanish influenza was caused by H1N1 influenza – a virus, which was said to be of avian origin.

The disease, which infected about five hundred (500) million people, roughly one-third of the world’s population at that time, lasted from 1918 to 1920 and consisted of four waves. The question that begs for an answer and the huge concern is why the world was not prepared to tackle, head-on, another pandemic in 2019.

It is of utmost importance that the next pandemic be pegged back, even before it surfaces. Since pandemics affect almost everybody and cut through continents, it becomes a matter of urgency to devise or deploy means of preventing another health crisis.

The world has suffered its fair share of epidemics and pandemics, and it is only fair and for educational reasons to explicitly mention some of them in this article.

In recorded or antiquated history, the first virulent disease that ravaged the world was the Plague of Athens, which occurred between 430 and 426 426BC during the Peloponnesian War. This disease, which killed a quarter of the Athenian troops and a quarter of the population, fatally weakened the dominance of Athens, but the malignant nature of the disease prevented its wider spread.

Then the Antonine Plague of 165 to 180 AD struck. According to historians, the disease, which was possibly measles or smallpox, killed a quarter of those infected, up to five million in total. It was brought to the Italian peninsula by soldiers who were returning from the Near East. After this, the Plague of Cyprian, which was said to be a second outbreak of what may have been the same disease as the Antonine Plague, occurred between 251 and 266 AD, killing five thousand people a day in Rome, Italy.

The 541 to 549 AD Plague of Justinian, also known as the First Plague Pandemic, began in Egypt and reached Constantinople the following spring, killing (according to the Byzantine chronicler Procopius) 10,000 a day at its height, and perhaps 40 per cent of the city's inhabitants. The plague, which was identified in 2013 as being caused by bubonic plague, killed a quarter to half of the world’s population at that time.

Between 1331 and 1353, another pandemic, christened the Black Death, also known as the Second Plague Pandemic, claimed the lives of about 75 to 200 million people worldwide. Starting in Asia, the disease reached the Mediterranean and western Europe in 1348 (possibly from Italian merchants fleeing fighting in Crimea) and killed an estimated 20 to 30 million Europeans in six years; a third of the total population, and up to half in the worst-affected urban areas. It was the first of a cycle of European plague epidemics that continued until the 18th century; there were more than 100 plague epidemics in Europe during this period, including the Great Plague of London of 1665 and 1666, which killed approximately 100,000 people, equivalent to 20 per cent of London's population.

Even though, the coronavirus pandemic did not ravage the world like some of the pandemics mentioned above, which claimed the lives of 90 percent of the world’s human population when they struck, probably due to the small population in comparison to today’s over 8 billion people, it is still pertinent to grind out solutions to prevent future occurrences that might again threaten to change the world and usher in a New World Order.

On May 23, 2023, weeks after the WHO officially ended the COVID-19 Global Health Emergency, Dr. Ghebreyesus gave a stern warning: “The threat of another variant emerging that causes new surges of disease and deaths remains, and the threat of another pathogen emerging with even deadlier potential remains.” With such a warning, it, therefore, behooves on us to be proactive and prevent any future occurrence of such pandemics.

According to experts, most emerging infectious diseases – whether in wildlife, domestic animals, plants or people – are driven by human activities such as agricultural intensification, wildlife use and misuse, and human-induced landscape changes, interacting in erratic ways that can have negative outcomes.

In recent times, Ebola and COVID-19 have posed the greatest threats in terms of pandemics, and the next pandemic is likely to spring forth from constant deforestation in Africa or the consumption of pathogenic animal meat in Asia. The “cycle of panic and neglect” is the term used in public health to describe the way the world responds to such health emergencies when they strike and ravage the earth’s inhabitants. At the height of the moment, the so-called Super Powers and even the international community often promise to prevent any form of future virus outbreak that could lead to catastrophic and wanton destruction of lives, but after the shock disappears, so also does the promise. As the COVID-19 pandemic loses grip on the population, the recurring decimal seems to be peaking its head again. In April 2022, G20 countries agreed to set up a global fund for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, and in June 2022, the World Bank approved the creation of the fund, which it said would require an estimated sum of 10.5 million dollars annually for about eight years.

This pledge or commitment looks good on paper, but in reality, only 15 per cent of the original goal has so far been achieved by countries and philanthropists, as the world focuses on returning to pre-pandemic life.

Instead of channeling investments towards preventing spillover, including reducing or curbing deforestation in hot spots around the world as suggested by the World Bank, it was reported sometime in December that the first tranche of money in the Pandemic Fund will be used for disease surveillance, laboratories and employment of health workers which had always been the practice that have yielded little or no result. Even though scientists warn that the path was the wrong one to toe, advocating and reiterating for deforestation monitoring and safe livestock consumption, the pioneers of this idea believe that a whopping $9 billion a year for such a cause is too humongous. They, however, agree that that sum would be like a drop in the ocean compared with the hundreds of billions of dollars that would be lost from outbreaks each year, not to mention the loss of lives, grief and untold hardship which could linger for a long time. The global economy is still reeling from the ill effects of COVID-19, and it might not get out of this setback anytime soon.

Rather than waste funds on irrelevances and placebos, the international community, the World Bank, the World Health Organisation and other stakeholders should channel their attention to workable preventive measures that would ward off impending pandemics. It would be a misplaced priority to expend money on curative or restorative methods, as was the case when COVID-19 began its ravenous journey from a meat market in Wuhan, China, to all the inhabited continents of the world.