

**BY MAAYAN HOFFMAN | MAY 23, 2022 | ANTISEMITISM**

## **WHAT IS WHO'S 'PANDEMIC TREATY?' AND SHOULD AMERICANS BE AFRAID?**

The concept of a “pandemic treaty” that would give the World Health Organization (WHO) superpowers to override the healthcare policies of any individual government during the next world health crisis has sent shockwaves across social and conservative media.

“The Biden administration is bringing amendments that would propose that all nations of the earth cede their sovereignty over national health care decisions to the WHO,” said former Republican Rep. Michele Bachmann in an interview on Steve Bannon’s War Room podcast.

Canada’s Conservative leadership hopeful Leslyn Lewis claimed in videos shared on social media that the treaty could give WHO the power “determine whether or not [in] a country like Canada, whether you’d be able to travel within or outside the country depending on the severity of the pandemic.” She also said that WHO would be able to restrict the types of medications that could be prescribed – “essentially eroding our democracy.”

But as the 75th World Health Assembly (WHA) opened Sunday, such a treaty was absent from the agenda and is expected only to be discussed rhetorically or in passing.

So, what is really going on?

The WHA agreed last fall to launch a global process to draft what would eventually become a convention, agreement or other international instrument under the Constitution of the World Health Organization to strengthen the world’s ability to fight and respond to potential pandemics, as a [WHO news release](#) explained in December.

The assembly adopted what it called “The World Together,” which established an intergovernmental negotiating body (INB) to manage the process of negotiating such a treaty. A first meeting was held in March and a second is expected to be

held in August, where a first draft of the treaty should be presented. It would then be reviewed at next year's WHA and submitted for final approval and ratification by delegates at the 77th WHA in 2024.

Among the items that health experts have said they would like to have included: Using a OneHealth approach to preventing pandemics; creating strong health systems at local and international levels; increased data sharing; reforming the WHO's alarm mechanism; and a mechanism for ensuring universal access to vaccines, medicines and other essential treatments.

Once established, the treaty would be adopted under Article 19 of the WHO Constitution, which would give the WHO the power to ensure compliance. To date, the only instrument established under Article 19 is the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which went into force in 2005.

“The idea that we see on social media that suddenly there will be a treaty the way we have the tobacco control treaty is wrong; these are just not the same thing,” explained Dr. Michel Thieren, Regional Emergency Director for WHO in Israel. “An emergent pathogen that goes global is not something we can regulate like the way we regular tobacco.”

What will be discussed at this year's WHA are changes to the International Health Regulations (IHR), which “provide an overarching legal framework that defines countries' rights and obligations in handling public health events and emergencies that have the potential to cross borders,” according to the WHO website.

The United States has recommended a series of reforms for the IHR, which mainly center on data sharing and acceptance of the immediate deployment of experts wherever a potential health threat might be – without restrictions.

“When there is an epidemic situation, the more we know, the better we can fight it,” Thieren said. “It is important to be able to investigate properly anywhere in the world. If we had a situation in which an independent assessment was facilities and data shared immediately and comprehensively, it would help a lot.”

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