



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

8 June 2007


Excellency,

I wish to inform you that on Wednesday, 13 June 2007, the President of the General Assembly will convene an informal meeting of the General Committee, open to all Member States and Observers, to discuss the pandemic preparedness of the Assembly. The meeting will take place at 3 p.m. in Conference Room 1.

Member States will hear a briefing by the United Nations/New York Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Coordinator and thereafter, will have an opportunity to share their views, comments and observations or pose questions.

In this regard, please find a paper entitled "Recommendations for the continuity of General Assembly operations in the event of an influenza pandemic" prepared by the United Nations Secretariat.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.


Francis Butagira
Acting President

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

**Recommendations for the continuity of General Assembly
operations in the event of an influenza pandemic**

Prepared by the UN Secretariat
April 2007

Recommendations for the continuity of General Assembly operations in the event of an influenza pandemic

I. Background

1. While it is impossible to predict the timing and severity of the next pandemic influenza outbreak, it is still necessary to plan for the possibility of such an eventuality well in advance. In this connection, all parts of the UN system have been actively working to develop pandemic preparedness plans, taking into account probable disruption of services due to absenteeism of UN staff, service providers and host government and host city workers (due to sickness, care for family members, disruption of public transportation, strict enforcement of rules restricting movement by land into, out of and within New York City, etc.).

2. This planning also takes into account certain assumptions on infection rates and mitigation strategies that have been accepted globally and by the host government. They include:

- Rates of infection by the pandemic virus may be as high as 30% to 40% of the general population.
- Infected persons may spread the virus inadvertently, as they may be asymptomatic for the first 24-72 hours.
- Each pandemic wave could last from six to eight weeks, with up to three waves occurring during an 18-month period.
- A pandemic vaccine will most likely not be widely available for several months after the start of the pandemic.
- Prevention strategies will be the key means of controlling the spread of the pandemic virus during the early stages.
- Social distancing and sanitary precautionary measures will be critical to any prevention strategy. These include: avoiding public gatherings; avoiding public transportation; and closure of schools and day-care centres.

3. The United Nations' preparedness plans for a possible influenza pandemic emphasize social distancing while maintaining critical business continuity. Consequently, the Secretariat is making arrangements to enable a limited number of critical staff either to telecommute from home or to commute daily to the office during medium- and high-impact pandemic scenarios.

4. Like any other institution in the world, the United Nations and its General Assembly would be affected by an influenza pandemic. The effects of such a pandemic could be so severe that usual patterns of working could not be sustained. Therefore, some analysis of ways in which the General Assembly might perform its critical functions was needed. This analysis is important, as it will enable the Member States and their Permanent Missions to the United Nations to make necessary logistical and other preparations. It will also enable the Secretariat to work out what kind of support and

services it may be able to provide to the General Assembly under pandemic conditions, and include this as part of the United Nations' pandemic preparedness plan.

5. This summary describes the possible impacts of a pandemic on the functioning of the General Assembly. It also suggests different ways in which this body could continue to carry out its critical functions during a pandemic, and lists the types of issues to be considered now as part of the United Nations' pandemic preparedness planning.

II. Pandemic scenarios for the United Nations in New York, expected operational constraints and proposed arrangements for the General Assembly

6. Although a wide range of possible developments could be envisaged should the pandemic influenza virus emerge, the United Nations in New York is using four broad planning scenarios. With the exception of an estimated average duration of a pandemic wave of six to eight weeks for individual communities, it is impossible to predict how long a given scenario may last, and for how long adaptations may have to be made.

7. The four scenarios are: low impact (A), medium impact (B), high impact (C) and high impact with temporary relocation of functions (D). (Transition from one scenario to another will be determined through analysis of the so-called "triggers". A table listing these "triggers" is attached to this paper in Annex I.)

8. It is expected that the pandemic will bring changes to the normal operating conditions of the United Nations, and these expected constraints are outlined for each scenario. For each scenario, the operational constraints apply equally to the General Assembly and the Security Council.

9. In order to support the General Assembly in maintaining its critical functions, the proposed arrangements for the General Assembly during each scenario should be considered in consultation with Member States.

Scenario A, low impact

10. Public life and business in the NYC area are hardly affected by the development of the influenza pandemic, but there is a risk of (rapid) transition to a higher impact scenario. Final preparations for Scenarios B, C and D will be put into place during Scenario A.

Operational constraints

- None. The United Nations would function as usual but would prepare for transition to other scenarios.

Proposed arrangements for the General Assembly

- Consideration might need to be given to reorganizing the agenda of the General Assembly in order to give priority consideration to issues which must be resolved in advance (i.e. UN budget, extension of peacekeeping mandates, election of non-permanent members of the Security Council, selection of the Secretary-General, etc.).

Scenario B, medium impact

11. Public life and business in the New York City area are partly disrupted by the development of the influenza pandemic, including air travel restrictions, rising rates of absenteeism and possible temporary disruptions in public services. There is a risk of (rapid) transition to a higher impact scenario.

Operational constraints

- As under Scenario A, with the following additions:
- Operational capacities of the Secretariat would be reduced. Although most staff may be able to reach the workplace, there will be a reduction of on-site staff to reduce the risk of infection. Many staff will telecommute from home.
- The Secretariat building will be accessible only through one entrance.
- The United Nations will be closed to the general public.
- Interpretation, which is staff-intensive, might be limited due to reduced presence of staff (in an effort to reduce the risk of infection).
- Meetings requiring room sound could experience periodic technical interruption, due to limitations in the number of on-site staff in order to reduce the risk of infection.
- Advance documentation may be provided in one language only. Meetings would be recorded and written meeting records could be prepared afterwards. These measures would enhance social distancing and reduce the risk of infection.
- Publication, on the intranet/internet and through other media, of the General Assembly's activities are expected to be reduced.
- Technical operations (teleconference, control room operation) are expected to be reduced.

Proposed arrangements for the General Assembly

- The General Assembly will still meet physically but with expanded sanitary precautions, such as enhanced daily cleaning procedures in the meeting rooms.
- The size of delegations could be reduced (i.e. not more than one person per delegation to attend meetings) in order to enhance social distancing, and reduce the risk of infection.

- Some deliberations and decisions could be deferred until the situation has returned to normal.
- Electronic distribution of documentation in all six languages will continue. Permanent Missions may choose to expand their use of print-on-demand. These measures would enhance social distancing and reduce the risk of infection.
- The General Assembly plenary and its General Committee could be considered as the main mode of working during the pandemic wave, in order to reduce the risk of infection.

Scenario C, high impact

12. Public life and business in the New York City area are greatly disrupted by the development of the influenza pandemic, and in this *force majeure* situation the United Nations is officially closed.¹ Absenteeism owing to illness and the need to care for family members, fear of infection and control measures by the host government authorities, could be very high. Schools and day-care centres are closed; public gatherings are restricted or prohibited. The host-country authorities will probably recommend, or even prescribe, that employers limit drastically the presence of on-site staff to reduce the risk of infection.

Operational constraints

- Due to active measures to reduce the presence of staff on site to only those required for critical activities, presence of UN staff on-site may be less than 5 per cent of normal levels.
- Access to the UN complex will be limited to staff performing on-site critical functions; critical telecommuting staff will work from home.
- UN staff will be asked not to use public transportation. Those working on-site will commute under managed conditions in order to reduce the risk of infection.
- Permanent Missions, NGOs and Media will not have access to UN premises.
- Cafeteria and other catering services in the Secretariat will be closed.
- Operational capacities of institutions and business entities in the New York area will be stretched to the extreme and overwhelmed in many cases. Services provided to the United Nations will be affected.

Proposed arrangements for the General Assembly

- Given the severity of pandemic conditions public gatherings would have potentially serious health and safety implications for delegations and the critical staff remaining on site. Since the United Nations headquarters would

¹ The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chief Administrative Officer (article 97 of the UN Charter refers), will exercise his good judgment to assess the risk to the United Nations in any given situation and take the appropriate measures. In this regard, the Secretary-General will decide when the United Nations in New York should move to Scenario C. In taking this decision, he will consult with the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

be officially closed, it is recommended that the General Assembly and Security Council not meet physically on United Nations premises.

- The use of electronic collaboration services by the General Assembly, while technically feasible, is not recommended.² The management of a 'virtual' meeting with 192 parties would be inherently complex, and verifying a continued quorum would be difficult. Another factor is unevenness in the levels of information technology available at the Permanent Missions. There will be financial, human resources and other implications, and Missions' staff would need to be trained to use this equipment. Given the high likelihood of technical failure, an investment in this technology is not recommended at present.
- The General Assembly may also consider granting the Secretary-General the authority to enter into decisions with financial implications for the duration of a pandemic wave under Scenarios C and D. In this context, the General Assembly may request a report from the Secretary-General on the modalities for ensuring that this decision could be practically implemented. This option will likely be cost-neutral, and has a low likelihood of failure.
- The President of the General Assembly should be equipped with the required technical tools to contact the membership (if it is not possible to establish contact with all 192 members, the President should be able to contact at least the members of the General Committee), the Secretary-General and pertinent Secretariat staff. This option will likely have limited additional costs associated with it, and has a low likelihood of failure (relating mostly to the likelihood of interruptions of telephone and internet service during a pandemic).

Scenario D, high impact with temporary relocation

13. As under Scenario C, public life and business in the New York City area are significantly disrupted by the pandemic, possibly to such an extent that host country authorities may implement significant containment and social distancing measures.

Operational constraints

- The United Nations is officially closed and the building is not usable due to failure of building services or high rates of absenteeism among critical staff.
- Access to the UN complex will be limited to the minimum number of security and facilities maintenance staff required to maintain the complex.
- The United Nations may relocate some of its critical functions to other locations. This option is feasible in a situation where the New York area is at the peak of a pandemic wave, whereas the wave has already passed at the United Nations Offices in Geneva, Nairobi or Vienna or other locations. Any decision for temporary relocation of headquarters functions would be taken in consultation between the Secretariat and the United Nations main bodies.³

² The Security Council is considering the use of electronic collaboration services in Scenario C. The smaller membership of the Security Council makes this option technically and operationally feasible.

³ The Secretary-General will decide when the United Nations in New York should move to Scenario D. In taking this decision, the Secretary-General will consult with the Office of the President of the General

- Other operational constraints, if any, therefore depend on the situation at the place chosen for relocation, and could comprise any of those mentioned under scenarios B and C.

Proposed arrangements for the General Assembly

- Provided that the pandemic has not affected other locations with the same severity, or that a pandemic wave has already passed its peak at other locations, transferring functions of the General Assembly and Security Council⁴ to United Nations Offices in Geneva, Nairobi or Vienna may be contemplated as an option if the General Assembly needs to meet on the most critical matters. However, consideration has to be given to the fact that only 171 Member States maintain permanent missions to the United Nations Office at Geneva. In Vienna and Nairobi this number is even less. Appropriate logistical and other arrangements would need to be made for the transfer of credentials accreditation of the General Assembly members to Geneva or any other UN Office well in advance, possibly before Scenario A. This option will likely be cost-neutral, but will entail the constraint that all 192 members may not be represented.

Assembly and the Security Council; he will also consult with and/or notify the host government (U.S. Mission to the United Nations).

⁴ The Security Council is not currently considering temporary relocation during a pandemic, but may explore this option in the future.

Annex I: "Triggers" (items for consideration when taking the decision to move from one scenario to another)

| | Pre-pandemic | Scenario A - Low Impact | Scenario B - Medium Impact | Scenario C - High Impact | Scenario D - High Impact (Temporary Relocation) | Inter-wave or Post-pandemic |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Proposed "triggers" | | | | | | |
| 1.1 Declaration of WHO Phase 4 | Move from pre-pandemic to A | | | | | |
| 1.2 Declaration of WHO Phase 5 | | | | | | |
| 1.3 NYC Dept of health directives | | | | | | |
| 2.1 Arrival of pandemic virus in western hemisphere | | Move from A to B | | | | |
| 2.2 NYC Dept of health directives | | | | | | |
| 3.1 Significant restrictions/interruptions of public transportation | } | | Move from B to C | | | |
| 3.2 Significant restrictions on transportation in New York region. | | | | | | |
| 3.3 Closure of public schools in New York City | | | | | | |
| 3.4 Closure of private schools | | | | | | |
| 3.5 Closure of day-care centres | | | | | | |
| 3.6 Pandemic virus infection rate among the general population | | | | | | |
| 3.7 Pandemic virus death rate (virulence) among the general public | | | | | | |
| 3.8 Absenteeism/illness rates among all staff at or above 25%. | | | | | | |
| 3.9 NYC Dept of health directives | | | | | | |
| 4.1 Absenteeism/illness rates among critical staff at or above 50% | } | | | Move from C to D | | |
| 4.2 Failure of critical UN complex systems (electrical, water, telecommunications) | | | | | | |
| 4.3 NYC Dept of health directives | | | | | | |
| 5.1 Public transportation resumes normal schedules | } | | | | Move from C or D to Post-pandemic | |
| 5.2 Public schools re-open | | | | | | |
| 5.3 Private schools re-open | | | | | | |
| 5.4 Day-care centres re-open | | | | | | |
| 5.5 Pandemic virus infection rate among the general public | | | | | | |
| 5.6 Absenteeism/illness rates among critical staff at less than 15% | | | | | | |
| 5.7 Absenteeism/illness rates among all staff at less than 20%. | | | | | | |
| 5.8 NYC Dept of Health directives. | | | | | | |