

Jana Lozanoska | Global Public Health as a Priority

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Jana Lozanoska is a Visiting Assistant Professor and Head of Human Rights Program at Bard College - Al-Quds University. Her research interests are in the areas of transitional justice, refugees, sustainability, and technology. She has edited and published various articles and volumes, and recently co-authored the article "Activities of Degrowth and Political Change," published by the peer-reviewed *Journal of Cleaner Production*.

Bard College
jana.lozanoska@gmail.com

We live in the twenty-first century, the century of increased technological and scientific advances, but the entire world seems completely unprepared for a viral pandemic. Meanwhile, NASA scientists are making intensive explorations on Mars; there are attempts at reproducing the sun's energy, at reconstructing the Big Bang, etc.

On the other hand, the Oscar winning *Joker* has correctly mapped out the fragility of the U.S. health system, as well as the social inequalities within, which could be juxtaposed to the global situation, as we are now witnessing the complete failure of liberalism both as a political and economic model under the threat of COVID-19. The question is, what follows after this? The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has mentioned a few times already that COVID-19 will bring about the fall of capitalism and the renewal of communism.¹ Even though one can partly agree with Žižek, one should still be wary about romanticizing this "renewal."

Under the COVID-19 threat, the idea of the free movement of people, and the Schengen zone within the EU is demonstrating itself to

¹ Slavoj Žižek, "Slavoj Žižek: Coronavirus Is 'Kill Bill'-esque Blow to Capitalism and Could Lead to Reinvention of Communism," *Russia Today* (February 27, 2020). <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/481831-coronavirus-kill-bill-capitalism-communism>.

be a very fragile one, as some of the EU states have set checkpoints/borders with other EU states²; while for the rest of Europe, the EU has completely shut down its own borders for non-EU nationals³ for a period of 30 days. It is quite worrisome that amid COVID-19 many states around the world have declared a "state of emergency." The declaration of a state of emergency provides for the executive branches elsewhere to adopt broad administrative measures without control of the judiciary and/or approval from the legislator. Those measures could be, but are not limited to: border closures for citizens and foreigners alike, compulsory collective quarantines, which might be a violation of the right to liberty, curfews, and other administrative decisions.

From the SARS outbreak in 2003, which is in the same group of viruses,⁴ states had exactly sixteen years to build and reinforce their public health capacities, and therefore the question that each citizen should ask their own respective government is: where is the public money? This inquiry and critique should be extended as well to the World Health Organization (WHO), which has failed in assisting the governments in the establishing of public health infrastructures in the long run, which is, by the way, their mission.

Just recently the WHO has set up a fund as an integral part of the Global Fund on Malaria, Tuberculosis and HIV⁵ to deal with and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. This fund has an allocated budget of \$500 million U.S.D.. According to the information, which, however, is not very clear, the entire budget allocation is cumulatively applicable for combating malaria, tuberculosis, HIV, and now COVID-19 in various countries worldwide.

Peter Sands, the Executive Director of the Global Fund, in his recent op-ed writes the following:

² Andrew Rettman, "Nine EU States Close Borders Due to Virus," *EU Observer* (March 16, 2020). <https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/147742>.

³ Kristie Pladson, "EU Closes Borders to Foreigners to Halt Coronavirus Spread: What to Know," *Deutsche Welle* (March 18, 2020). <https://www.dw.com/en/eu-closes-borders-to-foreigners-to-halt-coronavirus-spread-what-to-know/a-52824499>.

⁴ "Naming the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and the Virus that Causes It," *World Health Organization* (February 2020). [https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/naming-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-2019\)-and-the-virus-that-causes-it](https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/naming-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-2019)-and-the-virus-that-causes-it).

⁵ "COVID-19 Situation Report - 3 April 2020," *The Global Fund* (April 3, 2020). https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9505/covid19_2020-04-03-situation_report_en.pdf?u=63721519242000000.

... a new approach to global health security must embrace a much broader notion of health security than we've typically used. To start with, it won't work if it is only focused on pandemics, since every pandemic starts as a small outbreak. Unless you're looking at the small sparks, you'll miss the potential inferno. ... Even more importantly, it also won't work if the definition of health security only encompasses infectious diseases that threaten the lives of people in rich countries.⁶

Global health security, as Sands calls it, should be understood as a "global health access," and any future global and early response to pandemics should be conceived of in that direction, in order to avoid this kind of radical lockdown in the future. However, that requires a serious amount of budget funding. Yet, the question remains: who is going to take the lead and the responsibility for that? Lastly, following from the COVID-19 pandemic, we all have realized something very crucial - that there are no globally effective public health infrastructures in place.

⁶ Peter Sands, "Re-thinking Global Health Security," *The Global Fund* (March 27, 2020). <https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/blog/2020-03-27-re-thinking-global-health-security>.