

WHO May Lose Its Largest Donor



The U.S. is suspending its funding to the World Health Organization (WHO) until it has reviewed the agency's response to the COVID-19 crisis. This move has been widely criticised both in the U.S. and globally.

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During a White House [press conference](#) on 14 April President Donald Trump accused WHO of making deadly mistakes and having "failed in its basic duty" in its response to the pandemic. "Today I'm instructing my administration to halt funding of the World Health Organization while a review is conducted to assess the World Health Organization's role in severely mismanaging and covering up the spread of the coronavirus," Trump said. When asked about the causes to make such move now, Trump said the U.S. has had problems with WHO "for years" and the nation should have done this "a long time ago."

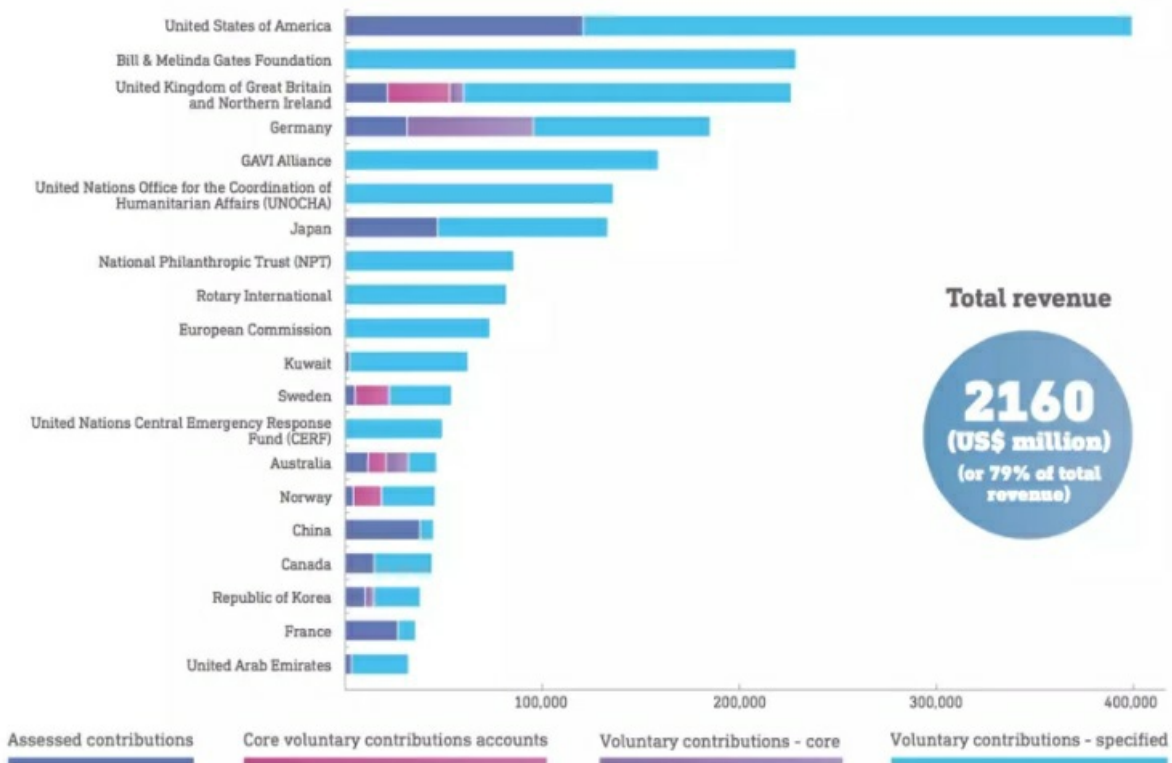
A senior administration official [said](#) to Reuters that Washington would stop a \$58 million "assessed contribution" that it was due to pay for 2020. The country also traditionally provides several hundred million dollars a year in voluntary funding. "That money will be spent with other partners," said a second senior Trump administration official.

So far it is unclear what mechanism will be used by the U.S., as the president usually does not have the authority to unilaterally redirect congressional funding.

The US is WHO's largest single funder. It [provided](#) more than \$400 million, or 15% of the organisation's [2018-2019 budget](#).



Top 20 contributors to the Programme budget 2018 (US\$ thousands)



Source: [WHO Results Report. Programme Budget 2018-2019. Mid-Term Review](#)

In February, WHO launched an [appeal](#) for \$675 million to help fight the coronavirus pandemic, of which \$61.5 million were for WHO's urgent preparedness and response activities for the period of February to April 2020. The agency is planning to launch an updated plan in April and will identify significantly larger resource needs for country response, research and development and WHO itself.

Criticism

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a news conference that he regretted US President Donald Trump's decision. "The United States of America has been a long-standing and generous friend of the WHO and we hope it will continue to be so," he [said](#) adding that the agency is reviewing the effect of any withdrawal of US funding on its work. "We will work with partners to fill any gaps and ensure our work continues uninterrupted," Dr Tedros commented.

[According](#) to Dr Mike Ryan, WHO's top emergencies expert, there would be opportunities in coming weeks and months to discuss WHO's budget with its other 193 states.

UN Secretary General António Guterres [said](#) the international community should be uniting "in solidarity to stop this virus" and it was "not the time" to cut funds to the WHO. "It is my belief that the World Health Organization must be supported, as it is absolutely critical to the world's efforts to win the war against Covid-19," he underlined.

The European Union [called](#) Trump's decision unjustified during the coronavirus pandemic. "Deeply regret U.S. decision to suspend funding to WHO. There is no reason justifying this move at a moment when their efforts are needed more than ever," Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, [said](#) on Twitter.

Bill Gates, whose Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was the second-largest donor to WHO for 2018-2019 budget, contributing over \$530 million, [wrote](#) that stopping funding for WHO during a world health crisis "is as dangerous as it sounds".

Zeng Guang, chief epidemiologist at the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, believes that by withdrawing WHO funding the U.S. is only trying to divert attention from its domestic epidemic. "The US has not responded to the epidemic properly and its accusations against the WHO go against the facts. This is unethical and will only make it more isolated in the world," he said in an [interview](#) to Global Times.

The current move is the latest in a series of Trump administration actions against international multilateral organisations. In February, the administration's proposal for 2021 [laid out](#) a \$65 million cut to WHO.

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Published on : Thu, 16 Apr 2020