
World Health Organization: Infectious Diseases Pose Global Threat

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Margaret Chan addressed the opening session of the 69th World Health Assembly in Geneva.

"In an interconnected world characterized by profound mobility of people and goods, few threats to health are local anymore," she said, pointing to air pollution and to outbreaks of Ebola, MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome), Zika and yellow fever.

"The Ebola outbreak in three small countries paralyzed the world with fear and travel constraints," the WHO leader said.

"Last year, a business traveler returning home to the Republic of Korea, infected with the MERS coronavirus, disrupted the country's economy as well as its health system," Chan noted.

"The rapidly evolving outbreak of Zika warns us that an old disease that slumbered for six decades in Africa and Asia can suddenly wake up on a new continent to cause a global health emergency," Chan said.

She asked delegates to give serious consideration to a set of proposals aimed at endowing WHO with the operational capacity to react when a health emergency of international scope emerges.

"Let me give you a stern warning. What we are seeing now looks more and more like a dramatic resurgence of the threat from emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. The world is not prepared to cope," Chan said.