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Science summit warns of escalating pandemic disaster

On Wednesday and Thursday, the World Health Network (WHN) hosted its second online “Global Summit to End Pandemics,” which featured over 20 distinguished scientists who have advocated for the global elimination of COVID-19. The summit provided further substantiation of the case for global elimination presented at the October 24 webinar, “How to End the Pandemic,” which was hosted by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).

The WHN summit featured 22 different sessions spanning roughly 25 hours and covering the most essential scientific aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Michael Baker of the University of Otago in New Zealand and Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz of the University of Calgary in Canada each gave similar presentations to those delivered at the WSWS webinar, outlining the measures necessary to stop the pandemic.

Dr. Baker, who successfully advised the New Zealand government on how to eliminate COVID-19 early in the pandemic, made clear that the government’s recent shift in policy had come over the objection of scientists, including himself. He stated, “At a certain point the [New Zealand] government decided that we needed to basically rejoin the rest of the world, and so switched to what we call a ‘tight suppression’ approach. Many scientists in New Zealand objected to this change, but the government felt for various reasons that it had no choice.”

Other scientists provided comprehensive reports on airborne transmission, the importance of using high quality face masks, inequities in global vaccine distribution, the effects of Long COVID, the development of new variants of SARS-CoV-2 and other topics. There were also reports on the experience of the pandemic in specific countries and regions of the world, including Norway, Sweden, Germany, Brazil, Canada, the United States, Taiwan, Qatar, Australia and other countries.

The summit was held at a critical point. Global daily new COVID-19 cases are once again surging, with nearly one million people officially infected over the two days of the summit.



Izhaar Hussain Shaikh, left, an ambulance driver who works for HelpNow, and others pick up a COVID-19 patient from his home in Mumbai, India May 28, 2020 [Credit: AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool]

Last week, the official death toll from COVID-19 surpassed five million, while estimates of excess deaths place the real figure at roughly 17 million. On Friday, a study was published in the *BMJ* which found that life expectancy has declined drastically in countries that have rejected the elimination strategy, with American men losing 2.27 years of life on average in 2020, while “more than 28 million excess years of life were lost in 2020 in 31 countries.” Despite the catastrophic situation globally, governments throughout the world are lifting mask mandates and all mitigation measures.

Dr. Anthony Leonardi, a T-cell immunologist who studied at Johns Hopkins University in the US, spoke on the latest research into Long COVID, a condition where symptoms

persist for weeks or months after initial infection. He cited multiple studies on Long COVID and stressed the uniquely harmful character of the virus, noting that Long COVID includes over 50 reported symptoms that “can span physiological systems,” with the most alarming research showing that COVID-19 can cause encephalitis, long-term neurological damage and the development of autoimmune disorders.

Dr. Leonardi has opposed unsafe school reopenings and authored a widely circulated letter outlining the neurological dangers posed to children by COVID-19. Asked about the potential long-term implications of unsafe schools reopenings, Dr. Leonardi responded, “There’s a publication that lists a lowered productive lifespan in kids, and it’s more of an attenuation in kids than adults. So it’s a bad idea, we’re setting kids up to have chronic illness.”

Asked to comment on the need to fight for a global elimination strategy, Dr. Leonardi cited a study conducted on rhesus monkeys which showed that every test subject infected with COVID-19 formed Lewy bodies in its brain. Lewy bodies are associated with Parkinson’s disease and dementia.

Drawing out the implications of this finding, Dr. Leonardi presented a horrific scenario, asking: “If that happens in humans, if we start getting neurodegeneration down the line, who is going to take care of all those people that are afflicted by it? Do we really want to risk almost everybody in the populace and have a very small amount of people able to take care of these other people?”

“I think there’s a risk we might see institutionalized end-of-life, where people aren’t taken care of, they’re just given a drug and pass away.” He added, “I think we run a big risk of something like that, just a massive amount of people with neurodegeneration and problems. So, it would be very wise to have a strategy of elimination.”

Multiple sessions at the summit highlighted the science of the airborne transmission of SARS-CoV-2, with speakers emphasizing the need to educate the population on this science, require the universal use of high-quality masks, improve ventilation in all schools and workplaces, and implement other measures.

At one session on aerosols, Dr. Chia Wang of the National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan commented, “It is really time for us to upgrade the current paradigm of disease control by including aerosol precautions, and we must pay more attention to the air we breathe.”

At another session, Julia Raifman, ScD, SM of the Boston University School of Public Health, spoke on the impact of the May 13, 2021 change in masking guidelines from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She referred to the CDC decision as “an historic policy error that will likely have ramifications potentially for decades.”

She noted that in 2020 there were 43 states with masking policies but that only Hawaii kept theirs in place after May 2021, while only seven states and the District of Columbia have since reinstated masking policies during the ongoing Delta surge.

In the same session, scientist Nicolas Smit noted that the CDC’s change in masking recommendations “came six days after the CDC finally admitted that airborne transmission was happening.”

In a session titled “Big Pharma and ‘Vaccine Apartheid,’” Dr. Anthony Staines of Dublin City University in Ireland denounced the for-profit pharmaceutical monopolies for creating global vaccine inequities. He commented, “We’ve ended up with a monstrously inefficient, very expensive and very unfair way of distributing resources around the world, and a way which puts us at unquantifiable risk. No one knows whether there will be another new variant, and no one knows if that new variant could be worse than the ones we have at the moment.”

The reports at the summit collectively provide a clear understanding of COVID-19, the dire character of the present situation, and what measures must be taken to eliminate the virus worldwide. The event should have been widely attended and viewed by millions. However, it has been blacked out and ignored by the mainstream media, with no reports in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* or any other corporate news outlet, underscoring once again their role in allowing the pandemic to continue.

Outside of this WSWS article, there has been no reporting whatsoever on the event.

Listening to the summit, one could not help but be struck by the disturbing chasm between the enormous significance of the content presented and the total absence of publicity in the media, which caused a low attendance at each session. At its highest point, only 80 people attended the opening session, and each breakout session only had roughly 10–30 attendees.

From a purely scientific standpoint, the participants are to be congratulated, and their work deserves widespread appreciation. Clearly, they were motivated by a desire for action to be taken and dedicated a great deal of time to preparing their reports.

However, there was a clear contrast between the science and the political perspective advanced at the summit. Deprived of a mass audience by the media, which feeds the public pabulum and lies on the pandemic, the scientists themselves framed much of their conclusions as appeals to the powers that be to listen and change government policy.

The argument was advanced that one can convince governments to eliminate COVID-19 because it would save them money. From a humanitarian standpoint, this should be irrelevant, and there is something profoundly wrong with a society where the saving of human lives has to be shown to be cost-effective.

But this argument is itself meaningless to the ruthless financial elites that have amassed trillions of dollars during the pandemic through the funneling of state funds into the stock market. In the US alone, the billionaires increased their wealth by \$1.8 trillion, or 62 percent, in just the first 18 months of the pandemic. While the international working class has suffered unfathomable losses, the stock markets continue to reach record highs globally.

The scientists are not political strategists. Not knowing how to reach broad masses of people and cut off by the media, they remain something of a shut-in community. In this context, the WWSW's October 24 webinar acquires all the more significance. That event, which has been viewed by over 10,000 people from over 100 countries, established a living link between science and the working class. It presented three-and-a-half hours' worth of scientific reports, as well as a clear political perspective, stressing that the working class is the only social force capable of ending the pandemic.

One of the central lessons of the October 24 webinar was that the fight to end the pandemic requires close collaboration between the international working class and the scientific community. Many workers who attended the webinar have told the WSWS how profoundly educated they were by the scientists, saying they now have a clear sense of what measures must be taken to save lives.

Taken as a whole, the reports at the World Health Network summit provide overwhelming proof that the only correct pandemic policy is one aimed at the global elimination of SARS-CoV-2. For this to be implemented requires the development of a mass movement of the international working class armed with a scientific understanding of the pandemic. As Karl Marx said so well, “Theory becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses.”

The WSWS will continue the struggle to forge a fighting alliance between scientists and the working class and help coordinate the global struggle necessary to put an end to the pandemic and save millions of lives worldwide.

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