

World Health Summit 2021 Opening Speech

Axel R. Pries, World Health Summit President

Dear President **von der Leyen**,
dear Minister **Spahn**,
dear Secretary-General **Guterres**,
dear Director-General **Dr Tedros**,
dear Excellencies,
dear Colleagues,
dear members of the worldwide global-health community!

My name is Axel Pries and I am very happy to welcome you all to the World Health Summit 2021 here in Berlin and digitally everywhere in the world.

My special thanks go to our high patrons
Chancellor **Merkel**,
President **Macron**,
President **von der Leyen** and
Director-General **Dr Tedros**.

We are looking forward to a vibrant meeting where representatives from academia, politics, industry, the health sector and civil society will once again discuss pivotal aspects of health and health policy worldwide.

This year we are expecting more than 370 speakers and 6,000 participants from all over the world. Bringing together different viewpoints from a diverse global community, united by the aim to improve health for everyone, has always been a hallmark of this meeting.

However, these are exceptional years, and we all need to do much more than we used to.

Open dialogue and international collaboration beyond all borders and sectors are more important than ever before, we just saw it in the opening film. **At the same time, a mere exchange of ideas and expertise is just not enough in the current situation: We need action.**

The world as we know it is at risk! The COVID-19 pandemic but also floods, droughts, storms, and heat waves around the globe provide more than enough evidence. Living and working conditions have been radically altered.

The worldwide reaction to the pandemic threat has exposed **strengths and weaknesses of the present global constitution:**

> **On the positive side, cooperation within the scientific community was international, fast and targeted. The competitive and agile search for the best solutions in the scientific and economic markets worked very well.** Academia and industry joined forces to develop and produce effective vaccines much faster than could be expected.

> **On the other hand, the flaws of our international political mechanisms were also revealed in the process.** The immediate reaction to the global threat by a virus, which does not respect borders, regulations, cultures or convictions, was predominantly national. This led to vaccine-nationalism and distribution inequity. At present, available doses are exceeding demand in some countries, while in others, still only a tiny minority of the population is vaccinated.

In the process, little consideration was given to the rational arguments put forward by academia, industry, and supranational institutions:

- It is obvious from epidemiology **that treating people according to population and individual risk profiles** should be a priority.
- It is obvious from trade interdependencies and international supply chains **that closing national borders** adds to the economic burden of the pandemic.
- It is obvious from a supranational perspective **that integration of responses to a worldwide health crisis** is needed to foster international solidarity and global stability.

These arguments are not primarily derived from humanitarian principles – they just reflect common sense supported by scientific analysis. Common sense supported by scientific analysis also implies that **we** as the international community will fail to master the **imminent and interlinking threats to human and planetary health** if we do not implement **substantial changes to our global political condition.**

This is a very difficult task and may conflict with reaction patterns deeply rooted in human psychology and in well-established power structures. **However, we do not have an alternative.** We all know it from everyday medicine: **If a condition is critical, you have to take action fast if you want to save the patient.**

Today, there are two main challenges to tackle and topics to discuss including at this very World Health Summit:

- First:



More equality in health requires more equality in wealth within and between countries.

- Second:
Improving health for the global population requires strengthening our global health institutions most notably, the WHO.

Now, it is by no means a new concept to achieve fundamental progress in population health by stepping outside of the usual medical domains.

Detlev Ganten, the founder of the World Health Summit and my predecessor as president of the World Health Summit will now present outstanding examples of people who did just that to foster Human, Global and Planetary Health and he will reveal a corresponding secret.

Detlev, the floor is yours ...

End of Opening Ceremony, following the last speech:

I would like to thank you all for your speeches, opinions, and insights.
Let us all together make a real difference for global health

The 13th World Health Summit is officially opened!