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Good morning and welcome to this first of two sessions on health. The first session will focus on Covid-19; the second will deal with the issues of global governance and health.

As I am sure you realize, Covid-19 is the worst combined health and socioeconomic crisis in living memory. In a little less than three years Covid-19 has infected at least 250 million people across the world and generated a global death toll estimated to be 14 million to 17 million people. At the highest point of the epidemic, 90% of children across the world were unable to attend school and an output of USD 22 trillion dollars is expected to be lost in the period 2020 – 2025, the deepest shock to the global economy since World War II. By November 2022, at least 125 million people were pushed into extreme poverty because of the pandemic.

The pandemic is not over. As we speak, hospitalizations are increasing again, at least in Europe and the US. The pandemic continues to have a profound impact on lives and livelihoods as economies slowly begin to recover in at least the wealthiest countries, but still falter in low-income countries, as we have discussed in last year's session.

This is the third time we are addressing Covid-19 at the World Policy Conference. The first event was virtual in 2020 we then held a session last year and some of those same speakers are with us today. Now, we are meeting again almost three years after the first cases of pneumonia due to an unknown new pathogen were identified in Wuhan, China.

Our session today has three aims. The first is to discuss the current pandemic situation and whether epidemiological scenarios can be built for the short and mid-term, and we will hear from Professor Antoine Flahault, the Director of the Institute of Global Health at the University of Geneva. Then we will hear three regional perspectives and how lessons from the pandemic are being learned in different regions; in Africa, from Dr Juliette Tuakli, Chief Medical Officer at Family, Child & Associates in Accra, Ghana; in the United Emirates, from Dr Maha Barakat, Director General of the Frontline Heroes Office; and in China, from Qiao Yide, Secretary General of the Shanghai Development Research Foundation. We will close by considering how other pandemic threats could arise at any time, particularly with the increasing opportunities for animal-human contacts at global level, and we will hear from Professor Christian Bréchet, from the University of South Florida and President of the Global Virus Network.