

PRESS RELEASE

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Ethics Council to debate the global dimension of the fight against pandemics

In a public hearing on 27 May 2021, the German Ethics Council and experts from Canada, the United Kingdom and Norway discuss international perspectives on pandemic preparedness and response in a broader context that goes beyond the current Covid-19 crisis.

By exchanging ideas with international experts, the Council members intend to learn from the experiences gained in other countries during the Covid-19 pandemic and, moreover, to scrutinise the tensions between national interests and the postulates of global justice and solidarity.

In the run-up to the hearing, the Chair of the German Ethics Council, Alena Buyx, maintained „Pandemics are global events. In order to be better prepared for such events in the future, we need to learn more from each other at the international level. This can only be achieved by honestly assessing the past and drawing appropriate conclusions for the future.”

The hearing begins with Ross Upshur who is a Professor of Public Health at the University of Toronto in Canada and chair of the Ethics and COVID-19 Working Group of the World Health Organization. He highlights structural similarities between recent ethical challenges and challenges that arose in previous pandemics. He also analyses ethical issues related to the management of uncertainty through research, the duty to care of health care providers, and to the global allocation of resources during a pandemic. It is of particular importance to him to improve the public communication of ethical recommendations as well as their implementation into clinical practice.

Sir Jonathan Montgomery is Professor of Health Care Law at University College London and chairs a working group advising the British government on ethical issues related to the Covid-19-pandemic. He sets out the reasons why ethical aspects have not been taken into due account in the political decision-making process in the United Kingdom despite appropriate frameworks existing in previous epidemics. According to Montgomery, this can be explained by the fact that many scientific and ethical advisory bodies started working in parallel, under serious time-pressure and with poor coordination.

Felix Stein from the Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo in Norway focusses on the COVAX initiative, which was launched in 2020 by the World Health Organization, the European Commission and the French government to provide poorer countries with access to Covid-19 vaccines more quickly. Stein claims that the initiative has been undermined by bilateral vaccine purchasing agreements and that, at least in part, COVAX even became a tool to subsidise pharmaceutical companies.

Members

Prof. Dr. med. Alena Buyx (Chair)
Prof. Dr. iur. Dr. h. c. Volker Lipp (Vice-Chair)
Prof. Dr. phil. Dr. h. c. Julian Nida-Rümelin (Vice-Chair)
Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Susanne Schreiber (Vice-Chair)

Prof. Dr. iur. Steffen Augsberg
Regional bishop Dr. theol. Petra Bahr
Prof. Dr. theol. Franz-Josef Bormann
Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Hans-Ulrich Demuth
Prof. Dr. iur. Helmut Frister
Prof. Dr. theol. Elisabeth Gräß-Schmidt
Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Dr. phil. Sigrid Graumann
Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Armin Grunwald
Prof. Dr. med. Wolfram Henn
Prof. Dr. rer. nat. Ursula Klingmüller
Stephan Kruip
Prof. Dr. phil. Dr. h. c. Dipl.-Psych. Andreas Kruse
Prof. Dr. theol. Andreas Lob-Hüdepohl
Prof. Dr. phil. habil. Annette Riedel
Prof. Dr. iur. Stephan Rixen
Prof. Dr. iur. Dr. phil. Frauke Rostalski
Prof. Dr. theol. Kerstin Schlögl-Flierl
Dr. med. Josef Schuster
Prof. Dr. phil. Judith Simon
Jun.-Prof. Dr. phil. Muna Tatari

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The programme of the event as well as further information is available at <https://www.ethikrat.org/en/hearings/international-perspectives-on-pandemic-preparedness-and-response>.

Registration is not required. The hearing is broadcast online with and without subtitles at <https://www.ethikrat.org/live>. The event is held in English with simultaneous translation into German. A video recording and a transcription are provided after the event.

Participants are cordially invited to join the discussion on Twitter with #pandemicresponse.