Dear Dr Tedros,

The STAG-IH is deeply concerned about the effects of confinement* (forced physical distancing) on health, and on social and economic wellbeing. The impact would be particularly disastrous in low- or middle-income countries (LMICs), in which there are few solidarity mechanisms in place to help balance the negative impacts of a disrupted health system (lack of essential health services) and a disrupted economy (increased unemployment).

Many of these countries look to WHO for guidance, and there is a risk that WHO is perceived by them as accountable for the negative impact forced physical distancing causes. Therefore, STAG-IH recommends that WHO should express strongly that it does not and has never recommended far-reaching measures upsetting and jeopardizing the social and economic fabric of LMICs with an (unproven) aim to curtail spread of COVID-19. The cure should not be worse than the disease.

*Most often called lockdown

WHO Strategic and Technical advisory Group for Infectious Hazards (STAG-IH)
   Chair - Prof David L. Heymann
   Members – Dr Juliet Bedford, Dr Delia Enria, Prof Johan Giesecke, Dr Chikwe Ihekweazu, Dr Gary Kobinger, Dr Clifford Lane, Prof Ziad Memish, Prof Myoung-don Oh, Dr Amadou Sall, Dr Anne Schuchat, Dr Kumnuan Ungchusak, Prof Lothar Wieler.

The Strategic and Technical Advisory Group, chaired by Professor David L. Heymann, is advising WHO Executive Director on the infectious hazards that may pose a potential threat to global health security.