WHO starts cutting costs as US withdrawal date set for January 2026

“Just stupid”

On January 23, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus sent a memo to staff announcing the cost-cutting measures. Reuters obtained a copy of the memo.

“This announcement has made our financial situation more acute,” Tedros wrote, referring to the US withdrawal plans. WHO’s budget mainly comes from dues and voluntary contributions from member states. The dues are a percentage of each member state’s gross domestic product, and the percentage is set by the UN General Assembly. US contributions account for about 18 percent of WHO’s overall funding, and its two-year 2024-2025 budget was $6.8 billion, according to Reuters.

To prepare for the budget cut, WHO is halting recruitment, significantly curtailing travel expenditures, making all meetings virtual, limiting IT equipment updates, and suspending office refurbishment.

“This set of measures is not comprehensive, and more will be announced in due course,” Tedros wrote, adding that the agency would do everything it could to protect and support staff.

The country’s pending withdrawal has been heavily criticized by global health leaders and US experts, who say it will make the world less safe and weaken America. In a CBS/KFF Health News report examining the global health implications of the US

withdrawal, Kenneth Bernard, a visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University who served as a top biodefense official during the George W. Bush administration, did not mince words:

“It’s just stupid,” Bernard said. “Withdrawing from the WHO leaves a gap in global health leadership that will be filled by China,” he said, “which is clearly not in America’s best interests.”

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