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"Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him." Tozer

US Supports Creation of Global Pandemic Treaty

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[Patsy Widakuswara](#)



FILE - Health care workers, dressed in full protective gear, take part in a ceremony kicking off a door-to-door COVID-19 vaccination campaign, in El Alto, Bolivia, Sept. 16, 2021.

WASHINGTON —

Amid growing concerns over the new omicron COVID-19 variant, the Biden administration is supporting efforts by the World Health Organization to establish a new international agreement on future pandemic preparedness and response.

"The United States is committed to working with member states to take forward the recent recommendations of the working group on preparedness and response. That includes developing a new WHO convention agreement or other international instrument and making agreements to improve the effectiveness and agility of international health regulations," White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday to VOA aboard Air Force One.

The U.S. had initially opposed the inclusion of language that would have made the so-called pandemic treaty — proposed by about two dozen world leaders in March — legally binding. But on Sunday, the administration supported a draft resolution that is being negotiated at a three-day virtual special session of the WHO governing body, the World Health Assembly, beginning Monday.



FILE - People wait 15 minutes after receiving the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine during national COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Pamplona, northern Spain, Sept. 2, 2021.

The pandemic treaty is expected to be ready in May 2024. Some public health experts are pessimistic of the outcome.

"The prognosis is still quite poor that we're going to get to a legally binding treaty that the U.S. and every other country of substance in the world accepts in the coming two or even three years," Krishna Udayakumar, founding director of the Duke Global Health Innovation Center at Duke University,

told VOA. "Anything that comes out of this process is very unlikely to make any change to our current environment and the current pandemic response."

The agreement would cover issues such as the sharing of data and genome sequences of emerging viruses, and of any potential vaccines and drugs derived from research. The goal is to come up with better coordination and cohesion in the global pandemic response and create a more robust global health architecture that will protect future generations.

"Over and over, COVID has reminded us that it will not go down easily and that we must act together," U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Xavier Becerra said in his remarks at the WHO session.

According to research by Duke University, more than 22 months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the world continues to struggle to enact a coordinated, effective and equitable response. Commitments and pledges remain largely unfulfilled, including the goal of achieving 40% vaccination coverage in every country by the end of 2021, and 70% coverage by mid-2022.

Some 650 million additional vaccine doses are required for at-risk countries to reach the target, factoring in expected deliveries from COVAX, the international vaccine sharing mechanism supported by the U.N. and the health organizations Gavi and CEPI.

Globalized crisis

Preventing future outbreaks requires a different way of thinking about global health security because COVID-19 represents a new form of globalized crisis, one that is both caused by and exacerbated by an increasingly interconnected modern world, said a spokesperson from Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, who spoke to VOA on background.

"One of the lessons we've learned from COVAX is that contingent funding, ready to go early in a crisis, would be a huge head start," the spokesperson said. Creating a global network of sustainable, quality vaccine manufacturing facilities is also key, he added.

While much is still unknown about omicron, public health experts believe that if large portions of the world's population are unvaccinated, variants will continue to appear, and the pandemic will be prolonged.

"Omicron's very emergence is another reminder that although many of us might think we are done with COVID-19, it is not done with us," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said at the start of pandemic treaty talks.

TRIPS waiver

Humanitarian organizations say that an international agreement on pandemic preparedness and response should include a waiver of patents and other intellectual property rights of vaccines, diagnostics and treatments of COVID-19 — the TRIPS waiver at the World Trade Organization.

"We need a pandemic treaty with an automatic waiver of intellectual property rules to maximize scale and redistribution of lifesaving tools so everyone can be protected at the same time," said Anna Marriott, Oxfam's health policy manager. "Never again can we repeat the scandal of vaccine apartheid witnessed today that has led to needless loss of life and created the perfect breeding ground for new variants."

An in-person WTO ministerial meeting on the TRIPS waiver set to start Monday in Geneva was postponed because of concerns over omicron and has been rescheduled for March 2022.

After initially opposing it, the U.S. announced its support of the waiver in April, leaving the U.K., Switzerland and the European Union as holdouts against the move.

"The work on the text-based negotiations, the building of consensus — something Ambassador Tai is in the lead on — is continuing, and we're continuing to press for that," Psaki said Tuesday, referring to U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai.

But many are skeptical that the Biden administration is putting any real diplomatic weight on the TRIPS waiver.

"We do observe the lack of more proactive leadership from the U.S. since it's changed the position," said Yuanqiong Hu, senior legal policy adviser for Doctors Without Borders Access Campaign.

Hu added that the U.S. could in theory use its clout to push the remaining small group of countries to agree, but it hasn't appeared to do so beyond public remarks such as last week's call by President Joe Biden for countries to "meet the U.S. challenge to waive intellectual property protections for COVID vaccines, so these vaccines can be manufactured globally."

TRIPS waiver negotiations at the WTO have been stuck, and progress remains dim.

"The U.S. — if it's serious — clearly is not using all of the influence at its discretion to try to move that issue forward," Duke Global Health's Udayakumar said.

VOA's Anita Powell contributed to this report.

Facing COVID passport mandate, more Swedes get microchip implants

Rise comes after Sweden required vaccination passport at all events with over 100 participants as of Dec. 1, local media reports

Atila Altuntas | 01.12.2021



STOCKHOLM

Following Sweden's announcement that the coronavirus vaccine passport requirement will be put into practice, the number of people who got microchips inserted under their skin rose, according to local media.

Swedish daily Aftonbladet reported on Sunday that a rise was recorded in the number of people who had microchips inserted in their hands following Sweden's announcement that a vaccination passport will be required at all events with over 100 participants as of Dec. 1.

Citing a resident, Hannes Sjoblad, the daily reported that he had a microchip with his vaccination passport inserted to his left hand.

Sjoblad noted that all his information about COVID-19 is reflected on his mobile phone when he takes his mobile phone in his left hand, adding that this is a new trend that has become popular among Swedes.

Another resident, Olle Helkimo, said he also had a chip inserted in his left hand, making him feel healthier.

According to digital cultures researcher Moa Petersen, around 6,000 people in Sweden have so far had a chip inserted in their hands.

Petersen stressed that those with microchip implants have stopped carrying vaccine passports, keys, ID cards, and even train tickets with them, thanks to radio frequency identification technology, a wireless system comprising tags and readers.

In 2017, the country's state-owned railway company announced that it started accepting microchip tickets with the rising number of people who had microchips implants.

Israeli Archaeologists Find Ancient Building from Time of the Sanhedrin

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[Emily Jones](#)



The first building ever discovered in Yavne from the Sanhedrin era. Photo Credit: Emil Aladjem, Israel Antiquities Authority

JERUSALEM, Israel – For the first time, Israeli archaeologists say they have found the remains of a building from the time of the Sanhedrin – a Jewish assembly that served as the supreme legislative body in ancient Israel.

Archaeologists uncovered the building in the central Israeli city of Yavne. The Sanhedrin

relocated to Yavne after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem more than 2,000 years ago.

Among the remains, they found chalkstone cups, “clear evidence that its occupants were observing Jewish laws of ritual purity,” the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) said in a statement.

Excavators also found an impressive cemetery about 230 feet away from the building. Experts say the location of the cemetery would have likely put it outside of the boundaries of the city in accordance with Jewish and Roman law.

“We encountered dozens of carefully arranged tombs spaced out at set distances, which probably indicates the existence of a ‘burial society’—some official body that was responsible for burial,” said Pablo Betzer and Dr. Daniel Varga, directors of the Yavne excavation for the IAA. “There are different types of tombs: some are coffins (sarcophagi), which are made mostly of stone with one lead coffin.”



Work on the ancient cemetery in Yavne. Photo Credit: Yaniv Berman, Israel Antiquities Authority

Archaeologists don't know for sure who is buried in the cemetery because there are no ethnic symbols on the coffins. But they speculate "with all due caution" that the coffins could belong to the ancient Jewish inhabitants and perhaps even some of the members of the Sanhedrin.

"If this hypothesis is correct, then at least some of the tombs, perhaps the most elaborate, may belong to the sages of Yavne, contemporaries of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiva and Rabban Gamliel," the IAA said.

Excavators found 150 glass vials on top of tombs. "The vials were probably used to keep precious liquids such as fragrant oils," said Dr. Yael Gorin-Rosen, head of the IAA's glass department.

"About half of them were locally produced and the other half were imported from Alexandria in Egypt. Vials of this type have been recovered in excavations at both Jewish and pagan burial sites from the first to the early third centuries CE. It is a mystery why the vials were placed *outside* the tombs in Yavne and not inside them, as was usual," Gorin-Rosen said.



Glass vials found on top of the tombs. Photo Credit: Yaniv Berman, Israel Antiquities Authority

After the Romans destroyed the Second Temple of Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin relocated to Yavne, the city became the spiritual center of ancient Israel. It was there that the ancient Jewish sages "restored the Torah to the Land of Israel and established laws in keeping with the new reality, without the Temple. It can be said that the foundations of Judaism as we know it today were laid in Yavne," the IAA said.

This latest archaeological discovery was made during attempts to build new housing units in the modern city of Yavne. Oftentimes before the construction process begins in Israel, the IAA conducts excavations to find and preserve any archaeological finds.



Hundreds of youths and pre-military program students are participating in the excavation. Photo Credit: Yaniv Berman, Israel Antiquities Authority

"It is exciting to see ancient accounts of the Sanhedrin translated into actual evidence in the field, with vessels, installations and buildings," said IAA Director Eli Eskozido. "With the project's initiators at the Israel Land Authority and Yavne municipality, the Israel Antiquities Authority is examining the possibility of preserving some of these finds and presenting them to the general public."

Practice Run For Third Temple - Reenactment Of Several Temple Ceremonies Planned



On Monday, December 6, a reenactment of several Temple ceremonies will be held in Mitzpe Yericho. The reenactments will include a demonstration of the anointing of the High Priest, and the lighting of the Temple menorah. A new altar will be dedicated for use on the Temple Mount. Each ceremony is an essential element of the Temple service and practical efforts such as these are intended to prepare for the Third Temple.

MENORAH: PURE OIL

As Monday will be the last night of Hanukkah, a demonstration of the lighting of the temple menorah will be carried out. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple by the Hasmoneans in 164 BCE and the ceremony next week will recreate several aspects of that historic event.

A demonstration of the lighting of the Temple menorah will be held. A Hanukkah menorah (also called a Hanukkiah) has nine branches whereas the one used in the demonstration, made of wood covered in gold and standing at about four feet tall, has seven branches, modeled after the Menorah that stood in the two Jewish Temples as well as the Tabernacle.

Since it is made of wood, the replica is technically not kosher for use as the menorah in the Temple, which must be made entirely of metal. The gold menorah intended to be installed permanently in the Third Temple upon its construction is on display in the Jewish quarter of Jerusalem.

Made to Biblical specifications, it is not portable and cannot be used for reenactments. Standing approximately six feet tall, it weighs half a ton, and contains 45 kilograms (approximately 99 lbs) of 24 karat gold valued at approximately three million dollars.

For the purposes of the menorah lighting, special oil has been prepared. Normally, olive oil is made by crushing the olives and then pressing them. As per the Biblical commandment, olive oil for use in the Temple and for anointing is made by smashing the olives by hand and then allowing the oil to drip for several days.

You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly. Exodus 27:20

This produces a very small quantity of oil, only about two percent of the volume of the olives as compared to 20 percent by pressing. But the method described in the Bible produces oil that is vastly superior to that produced by any other method. The initial trial run by the United Temple Movement prepared about 450 pounds of olives, producing 25 quarts of oil. The husks are then pressed and the oil can be consumed or used for adding to grain offerings.

As much as possible, the ritual purity of the olives is preserved. As soon as the olives are pounded, they become open to impurity. They are therefore processed in an area open to the sky and the workers wear surgical masks, as saliva can transfer impurity. The hammers are made of plastic and the surface is marble, materials that cannot receive ritual impurity.

Burning the oil in the Temple was considered a sacrifice in every respect, and does not require an actual Temple building to house it. The Biblical commandment could be fulfilled today by placing the Menorah on the Temple Mount, filling it with the oil that has been prepared, and having it lit by a Kohen (a Jewish man from the priestly caste).

The demonstration will be carried out by Kohanim (priests) wearing garments adhering to Biblical specifications and using silver trumpets, prepared for use in the Holy Temple.

ANOINTING THE KOHEN GADOL

A demonstration of the anointing of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) will also be held. Rabbi Baruch Kahana will serve as the Kohen Gadol for the purpose of this demonstration. Rabbi Kahana has served an essential role in educating Kohanim to serve in the Third Temple and has served as the Kohen Gadol in many of the Temple reenactments.

For this purpose, the pure olive oil is prepared for use in the anointing. The anointing oil was described in the Bible to be used in the consecration of the Tabernacle:

Make of this a sacred anointing oil, a compound of ingredients expertly blended, to serve as sacred anointing oil. Exodus 30:25

It is important to note that the oil was called in Hebrew שמן המשחה (shemen ha-mishchah), literally translated as oil of anointing. The Hebrew word for Messiah is משיח (Mashiach), literally the anointed one though this term is also used in the Bible for anyone who has been anointed.

Originally, the oil was used exclusively for the priests and the Tabernacle articles, but its use was later extended to include prophets and kings:

Shmuel took a flask of oil and poured some on Shaul's head and kissed him, and said, "Hashem herewith anoints you ruler over His own people. I Samuel 10:1

It is expressly forbidden by the Bible to recreate the oil for any other purpose, punishable by kareth, the most severe punishment described in the Bible. The ingredients as described in Exodus 30:23-25 are as follows:

Pure myrrh, 500 shekels weight (about 6 kg)

Sweet cinnamon, 250 shekels weight (about 3 kg)

"fragrant cane" (sometimes translated as calamus) 250 shekels (about 3 kg)

Cassia, 500 shekels (about 6 kg)

Specially prepared olive oil, one hin (about 6 liters, or 5.35 kg)

All of the ingredients must be prepared in total purity. A special jug was made to hold the anointing oil and was marked with a seal.

DEDICATING THE ALTAR

The event will also feature the dedication of a new altar. The altar adheres to the minimum requirements which will allow it to be used on the Temple Mount. It is hollow and relatively small, designed to be filled with specially selected stones that have already been prepared. This altar is designed to be ready at a moment's notice and able to be transported and assembled on the Temple Mount.