

WHO's SECRETS

by Giulio Valesini, Cataldo Ciccolella and Norma Ferrara

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI (TV HOST)

With regard to national plans we should talk about the pandemic plan, the withdrawn dossier of the World Health Organization (WHO). We talked to the author of the dossier, Zambon, who decided to bear witness to the prosecutor office in spite of the veto of the WHO, and then to tell his truth in an exclusive interview. We will also show you emails which are embarrassing WHO.

GIULIO VALESINI

Dr. Guerra... You asked the researchers to correct the pandemic plan date because you were under Report's spotlight. Can you explain this? To our knowledge you even discussed the fig-leaf strategy with Tedros (WHO's Director general)? Why were we to avoid hurting Minister Speranza's political sensibilities, Dr. Guerra? 50,000 people died, Dr. Guerra... give me an answer.

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

It is 11 May. A few hours before Report's episode dedicated to the WHO and the absence of an updated pandemic plan in Italy. "Tonight we are going on Report's teeth and we cannot be suicidal". "I am now blocking everything with Soumya (WHO Chief Scientist). Get me the revised version as soon as you can. It can't get out this way." "You have to correct it now."

GIULIO VALESINI

So Ranieri Guerra asks you to alter the report, write a false date for the pandemic plan.

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

There have been emails and also a phone call asking to change the part of the text about the pandemic plan, which was at the beginning of the publication. They were asking to alter it, to write that the pandemic plan had been updated since 2006, using the exact words "updated" and "reconfirmed". By consulting all the authors, we decided that we could surely use the term "reconfirmed" because it hadn't really changed one iota since 2006, but we certainly couldn't write "updated". That would have been a false statement, and I didn't feel like.

GIULIO VALESINI

Guerra told you to change the date, the true date of the Italian pandemic plan, did he threaten you?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - - WHO RESEARCHER

Yes, it is correct. Where he says that he was on the doorstep of the Director General and that if I had not changed the text as requested, he would have said that I would have put the WHO under accusation, considering the Report's episode that was about to be broadcasted that evening. I knew absolutely nothing about it. In the evening, watching the Report's programme, I understood why: there were severe accusations about links between China, Ethiopia and other things, and there was also a section on the pandemic plan. In Geneva there was a great deal of apprehension about the

documentary and so Tedros certainly knew about it too, obviously he would have put me in an awkward position, I could have been fired at any time...

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI (TV HOST)

"We could not tell a falsehood", Zambon says, and he admits the pressure he received from the adjunct director of the WHO, Ranieri Guerra. He asked him to alter some of the contents of the dossier which were critical. Starting with the date of the pandemic plan. Publishing the real one, 2006, would have greatly embarrassed the Italian government and all the (Minister of Health's) executives who were in charge of the prevention task: Ranieri Guerra himself, (Giuseppe) Ruocco and (Claudio) D'Amario too. He (Ranieri Guerra) also asked Zambon to remove the reference to Dr Curtale, an expert who said in an article published in april: "we have an inadequate pandemic plan, old". Nevertheless, if we had implemented it, we could have limited, at least partially, the spread of the virus". These are all tiles which confirm Ranieri Guerra's strategy. A strategy that himself declared to have implemented in order to transform WHO in the "conscious fig leaf" of the unpopular decisions of the Italian government. In truth the WHO, employing this strategy, covered also itself. For this reason they tried to prevent Zambon from going to the Prosecutor's office of Bergamo, evoking diplomatic immunity. They didn't want Zambon to denounce the pressures he received, and what he meant when he wrote in the dossier that the Italian response to the virus was "chaotic, improvised, creative". Now Report has come into possession of some embarrassing emails for the WHO. An email from the head of the Legal Office of the European branch of the WHO. "The WHO is caught in the crossfire of numerous lawsuits and parliamentary enquiries because of its handling of the virus, and we must be careful not to set a precedent", writes the lawyer. "For these reasons, we ask you not to attend the hearing". They fear millionaire compensations, for this reason, they prefer to bury the truth. Now. Zambon decided to disobey the WHO's order, risking being fired but he decided to testify in front of Bergamo's Prosecutor. He wants his people, italian citizens, to know the truth. Ours Giulio Valesini and Cataldo Ciccolella.

GIULIO VALESINI

If you could rewind, would you write again "improvised, chaotic and creative".

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

Frankly, I am very proud of the contents, and how the publication looks. I wanted it to be read by people not only by ministers and policy makers, I wanted it to be read by people so they could be prepared also from an emotional point of view.

GIULIO VALESINI

In your opinion, how much did the annoyance of the Minister, of the Italian authorities, influence the withdrawal of the report?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

After the publication, a fire broke out, I think, in various institutions in Rome. I know as a fact that there was great turmoil. I must say it hurted me a lot.

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

This correspondence of 15 May, when the report had just been censored by the WHO, confirms (the political turmoil). Kluge (WHO Europe Director) is worried about Minister Speranza's reaction, so much so that he writes "it's the key issue, my relationship with the minister who was very disappointed", then Kluge adds "I will write to the minister

that we will set up a group of experts Ministry of Health/ ISS (National Health Institute)/WHO to review the document". In other words, in order to mend fences with Speranza, Kluge goes so far as to devise a sort of group for an orchestrated review of the work.

GIULIO VALESINI

These are pressures from a political point of view in relation to this kind of relationship, aren't these?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - OMS RESEARCHER

The minister himself and also the National Health Institute should have been informed of the publication of the report by Ranieri Guerra. He asked me, a month before the publication was to be launched, it was about mid-April, he asked me for a detailed index of the publication to share with Minister Speranza. And I sent the table of contents, which is not just an index, but also with data that would have been included under each chapter.

GIULIO VALESINI

Do you think it is normal for the management of WHO Europe, to agree with the Health Minister on the corrections to be made to an independent report?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

I found it strange. In fact, when I was asked for the text later on, in order to amend it, all the authors and I agreed that the WHO could do absolutely whatever it wanted, but without our name.

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

17 May, David Allen, director of Business Operations Europe at WHO, has a clear view on why the dossier was not republished: "I believe the reason for the continued delay is to ensure that the host government has the opportunity to review and provide input".

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

At a certain point, even though I was the coordinator of the publication, it was taken out of my hands and handled elsewhere.

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

In an email dated 28 May, Zambon warns Director General Tedros that the withdrawal of the dossier, critical of the management of the virus in Italy, risks damaging the WHO's reputation. "A WHO publication (approved at all levels, including the Chief Scientist) has been withdrawn, effectively damaging the WHO's credibility; There is a risk of catastrophic damage in terms of independence and transparency if a 'censored' version of the publication were to be modified."

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

I didn't get a reply to that email yet.

GIULIO VALESINI

You are saying that the Director General The드로스, although informed of every single issue, hasn't done anything to safeguard the reputation of the World Health

Organisation. Even knowing about the threats of dismissal against one of the researchers?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON – WHO RESEARCHER

Yes. That's what happened.

GIULIO VALESINI

Can you confirm to me that, even after your multiple reports within the WHO, not a single formal investigation procedure about what happened was opened?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

I have sent numerous reports to all the competent bodies, the ethics committee, the investigation (Oversight), the director of business operations and even to the Secretary General of the United Nations. To date, I don't know if any investigations have been carried out.

GIULIO VALESINI

Can you confirm that in an email, Ranieri Guerra told you about the 10 millions that Italy gave to the WHO? As if to say, you tell me if I'm saying it wrong: "We can't afford to upset the Italian government because they have just donated 10 million Euros to the WHO".

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

I received the email where the 10 million donation is mentioned. It does not say what it was intended for, but it is certainly put in the context that the publication should not be critical.

GIULIO VALESINI

The WHO and even Ranieri Guerra himself are saying that the withdrawn report was full of inaccuracies. They never wanted to tell us which ones in detail, and you know what these serious inaccuracies were...

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

No, I have absolutely no knowledge of the serious inaccuracies in the report, which I rule out because, otherwise, it would not have been approved.

GIULIO VALESINI

Listen, was the approval of the report by the Committee headed by Soumya Swaminathan full?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

It was a full approval. Only two small comments were made regarding stylistic consistency, i.e. making sure that the style was the same throughout the text, let's say, and the other regarding the chronology of the pandemic.

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

And as far as we know, before publication, Zambon's team also accepted several notes by Ranieri Guerra: "160 changes have been made since the version you saw, 2 references have been added and 32 points of the text have been changed after reviewing your comments". On January 5th, after the WHO's warning about the spreading of pneumonia of unknown origin in China, the minister of Health should have triggered the measures of the pandemic plan, Phase Three, Level One. They should

have checked the stocks of DPI and antiviral. We (Italy) had those active ingredients stockpiled in 2006. Report can show for the first time the storage in which are kept. It is in the suburbs of Rome and is property of the Ministry of Health. All around the soil is polluted by mercury and pesticides, with cloth covering the area not yet cleared.

GIULIO VALESINI

Are the antivirals stored here in anticipation of a pandemic?

MAN

There is a minimum (according to the) plan, it's always been. Obviously if a pandemic breaks out later...

GIULIO VALESINI

However, Remdesvir has now been brought to you.

MAN

They shipped it from Ireland.

GIULIO VALESINI

But I read something, that over there is a polluted area, but what kind of pollution is, what is it?

MAN

There was something, I guess they have already fixed it.

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

Ranieri Guerra also spoke to the prosecutors in Bergamo about the stock, he assured that Italy had a stockpile of antivirals ready in case of a pandemic. Report is able to document the conditions in which they are stored. Inside the Ministry of Health's warehouse. In 2005, Italy bought hundreds of kilos of active ingredients from Roche, for millions of Euros, to make Tamiflu, which is now stored in these barrels. Documents acquired by Bergamo's prosecutors a few weeks ago show that most of the batches of the active ingredients have expired. Despite the fact that Roche had already retested its active ingredients once.

GIULIO VALESINI

Listen, would an updated pandemic plan have helped Italy to better deal with Covid?

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

Well, I think so, it is not possible that a plan made 14 years ago could be up to date. The influenza pandemic plan is the basis of a response to a pandemic caused by different viral agents. However there have been a few (new epidemics since 2006) that have been caused by Coronaviruses: SARS in 2003, then MERS in 2014-2015. That was a wake up call.

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

Report is able to explain why the WHO is trying to prevent its researchers from going to testify at the Prosecutor's office in Bergamo. This is an email from the head of WHO Europe, Legal department (Chantal Streijffert Garon).

"There are currently several COVID-19 related lawsuits against WHO and numerous

parliamentary inquiries involving WHO globally. We need to be mindful not to set a precedent"(...) " In light of the above, you are requested not to attend the hearing of the Sezione di Polizia Giudiziaria Guardia di Finanza"

GIULIO VALESINI VOICE OVER

The WHO fears that its response to Covid will end up in courts around the world. But despite the warnings and the (forced avail of) immunity, Francesco Zambon, a few days ago, decided to testify anyway.

FRANCESCO ZAMBON - WHO RESEARCHER

Certainly, I won't back down.

SIGFRIDO RANUCCI (TV HOST)

We have the world record of deaths due to the virus. 111 per 100,000 inhabitants, according to a study by Johns Hopkins University, published a few days ago. There must be a reason. And 70,000 deaths, including hundreds of doctors and nurses, and their families must have an answer. For Zambon all we can do is to say "Thank you", for choosing to testify ignoring WHO's requests. The mission of the Organization should be to improve the standards of health in all the member states. Also Ranieri Guerra went to the prosecutor's office, he said we had a valid pandemic plan, and that we had a warehouse where antivirals were kept. We showed you the state of that warehouse. A storage in the middle of a polluted area, keeping active substances that were declared expired by Roche. The Prosecutor's office of Bergamo wants to investigate and asked AIFA (Italy's FDA), to try to assess if those active principles (which are the basis for the antiviral drug) can still be tested. It seems that Aifa, after weeks, is not yet able to answer, the Italian FDA asked EMA, the European medicine agency. Go figure if we were about to use these active principles promptly. That warehouse would have represented the hope of a country to contain the pandemic wave, albeit a flu pandemic. It is instead the worst metaphor, it represents the inadequacy of a country to deal with a Virus.