

Principles for a Sustainable Future for Latin America in Times of Pandemic and Global Crisis

Introduction

The values at stake

- The COVID-19 global pandemic sees the world facing its worst crisis since World War II. We express our compassion for the unprecedented loss of human lives that is ongoing in countries all around the world, and our special concern for the health and economy of the more vulnerable populations and communities.
- We value State response that puts science at the center of political decisions and promotes economic support programs that protect the most vulnerable.
- This pandemic is part of a wider systemic crisis which, along with the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity, comes from the way in which the human species has interacted with nature.
- We are facing a global emergency that transcends national borders, and exposes our vulnerability and interdependence as part of one global community. It demands a profound revision of the social contract — at the national and international levels — towards one based in cooperation, the strengthening of democratic principles, and respect for the limits of nature.
- In spite of internal political differences, Latin America shares cultural elements, language, an ancestral heritage from its indigenous peoples, and its natural capital. This common ground offers opportunities for a regional strategy of cooperation that would allow our countries and societies to tackle the present and future challenges with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Causes of COVID-19, the planet's systemic functioning and its limits

In the last 30 years, our global connectivity has grown exponentially, increasing our exposure to systemic threats such as this pandemic. Over the same period, we have seen the weakness of our governing systems. democratic and republican institutions, environmental stewardship and healthcare have deteriorated in the majority of our countries. They are inadequate to face the challenges of a planet with more than 7.5 billion human beings, settled mainly in urban centers, almost turning their backs to their

rural and natural environments. This institutional fragility exposes vulnerable sectors even more, as is the case for rural communities and precarious urban settlements.

The COVID-19 pandemic is of zoonotic origin, in association with various concurrent factors pointed to repeatedly by the scientific community as probable causes of diseases, deaths, and regional and global catastrophes:

- loss of the natural habitats of certain species of fauna which, faced with a lack of resources, approach populated areas
- consumption of and trade in wild fauna
- global warming, which allows for the migration of vectors of new diseases, and
- the depleted quality of the natural environment in most countries.

At a time when the number of displaced people escaping war, violence and poverty is increasing, the global pandemic is exacerbating nationalist tendencies and increasing isolation barriers. The lack of trust in multilateral institutions and the absence of global leadership with a capacity to cooperate is only deepening the health crisis, putting the lives of millions at risk.

This coronavirus has unveiled the interdependence between nations and ecosystems, and exposed the fragility of the global community. We will very likely face other new pandemics until we develop containment systems capable of preventing them. If we can do that, we will be able to respond rapidly and in solidarity as an interdependent global community.

The consequences for a fragile region with high vulnerability and low capacity to face and manage systemic crises

Because of its nature, similar to that of the climate crisis, this health crisis reminds us of the deep inequity existing in the world.

- In general, countries of the region do not have health systems with the necessary equipment to care for the thousands already affected by COVID-19.
- Access to water and sanitation systems is vital to sustain regular hygiene practices. In Latin America, a region that possesses one third of the world's fresh water, 34 million people still do not have access to drinking water and 15 per cent of the population still waits for access to

sanitation services, increasing the vulnerability of communities most in need (ECLAC, Regional report 2018).

- Latin America and the Caribbean is the most urbanized region of the planet, with a high concentration of low-income people living in overcrowded conditions where it is not viable to practice the social distancing required to prevent the contagion and spread of COVID-19. The countries of the region have a combined population of 630 million — 8.6 per cent of the global population. More than 80 per cent of the region's inhabitants live in urban areas, especially in megacities that concentrate more than 30 per cent of each country's population. (ECLAC, 2018).
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, around 50 per cent of the workforce — at least 140 million people — work in the informal sector without social safety nets.
- The rapid growth of migration in recent decades has notably increased the urban population living in overcrowded and informal conditions and highly vulnerable to health crises.

We belong to societies with unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. The irrational demand for resources from a growing population and the resulting waste exceeds the carrying capacity of our planet. In summary, we are a population that does not know or seem to care much about the boundaries of our planet.

Lessons learned

1. This global pandemic exposes and alerts us to the extent of the deterioration we have brought upon our planet. It allows us to understand its uniqueness, which provides us with life, goods and services; to value its limits; and to recognize the urgent need for us to respect its systemic functioning.
2. In the face of this health emergency, governments have been able to adopt relatively quickly measures to address the fundamental sanitary and economic issues. This simple fact proves that, when political will exists, nation states and the global community are able to undertake structural changes.
3. Science has been instrumental in the identification, management and planning of possible solutions to the sanitary emergency. As in the climate

crisis, scientific, political and social leaders anticipated the risk and suggested the development of global systems for fast action to face the threats to life on the planet and our survival. The pandemic proves that managing risks while ignoring science has disastrous implications and a high economic and social cost. New global emergencies, previously foreshadowed and today observable, force us to come up with responses that are global and coordinated.

4. The abrupt closure of economic activities — maintaining only those considered ‘essential’ to health, the provision of food or the collection of waste — renews the need to reflect on present models of production and consumption. It is necessary to rethink an economic model based only on the permanent growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
5. The COVID-19 pandemic forces us to deepen the debate, and to value those businesses and economic activities designed to respond to today’s social and environmental challenges. We need new business models and new ways of doing business. Optimizing the economic model implies rewiring companies’ DNA to integrate environmental and social goals in their purpose and central activities.
6. If we give it a chance, nature’s resilience can improve environmental conditions in cities — especially air quality — through a decrease in short-lived pollutants, generating a positive effect on health and the life of the population.
7. The health crisis generated by COVID-19 is causing the loss of hundreds of thousands of human lives and an abrupt paralysis of economic activities that sustain the life of our countries. This disruption provides a lesson similar to other systemic threats observed by science and caused by climate change, which put at risk the existence of the human species and life on the planet. Today, more than ever, we are aware that the health of the planet means the health of those who inhabit it.
8. In spite of the current social confinement required to contain it, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, in the light of adversity and the suffering of our fellow citizens, the existence of fundamental human values of solidarity, generosity, and gratitude towards those who take care of us.

Foundations for a sustainable renaissance of Latin America

We need to steer the world towards a ‘renaissance’ in which the planet and its limits are the essential framework for our political and economic decisions — a renaissance aimed at guaranteeing life and the wellbeing

of humanity as well as the amazing diversity of organisms that make it possible and lasting. A “new deal for nature and people” is needed, bringing forth commitments by states and other actors to a new and effective framework aimed at reversing the loss and deterioration of our planet’s natural conditions. Latin Americans have a role, a huge potential, and a singular responsibility in the task of reconnecting with nature and life systems. From our singular position, we emphasize the need to substantially modify the prevailing order, adopting instead a revised social contract that can sustain the peace, dignity, integrity and life of people, with the promise of sustainable and long-lasting development. This new local, regional and global social order must include the following principles:

1. Scientific knowledge must back up decisions. Science, as the basis of knowledge for managing risks and global threats, must guide cooperation and political, economic and environmental decisions. Investment in scientific research and development — from prevention of these global risks to possible solutions — has to be at the center of the economic priorities of public and private institutions.
2. Solidarity must guide the answer to global crises. For a sustainable renaissance, we must recognize the interdependence among humans and between them and nature. We must promote a healthy planet Earth, based on solidarity, cooperation, and complementarity between us.
3. We must advance towards an economy not only of growth but of wellbeing. A sustainable renaissance demands that ‘plans for economic stimulus’ to exit from the economic crisis caused by this pandemic serve to strengthen our capacity for resilience, restore natural systems, and speed up the transition towards an economy of wellbeing within our planetary boundaries.
4. The climate and biodiversity commitments in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must be renewed. We must reinforce the ambitious cycle of the Paris Agreement; the reformulation of the Aichi targets from the Convention on Biological Diversity through the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework; and compliance with the SDGs as a central commitment towards 2030. The temporary postponement of both Conferences of the Parties does not alter our climate responsibility or our responsibility to address the loss of nature, species and ecosystems. It is a priority to link post-COVID-19 economic

recovery plans to long-term strategies to achieve 'net-zero emissions', speeding up the transition to nature-based energy solutions and the development of a resilient society, all within our planet's boundaries.

5. The development of technology must be put at the service of solutions, based on democratic principles, respect for human rights and the right to privacy of information.
6. The role of the state and its governance structures at all levels must be examined in order to strengthen democratic, republican institutions.
7. New business models that integrate economic, environmental and social objectives must be developed. In the renaissance of a new economy based on sustainable principles, the business sector plays a crucial role. The existence already of thousands of companies that aim to redefine success, integrating environmental and social goals into their economic activity, is a sign that it is possible to head towards a circular economy without waste. It is time to invest decisively in human creative capacity and in regeneration technologies, where companies provide financial and human capital, aware of their enormous capacity and responsibility to simultaneously create social, environmental and economic benefits.

In 2019, global protests called millions of people to action, asking for substantial changes in our lifestyle. Our experiences throughout this global pandemic demonstrate that it is possible for structural changes to take place. The world will not be the same after this pandemic. We trust the capacity of current and future generations to create the conditions for a common future that is radically different – one in which the human species takes responsibility for the care of nature and of one another, informed by scientific knowledge of the laws of nature, of our creative capacity, and of the privilege of living in a planet that is able to generate and regenerate its systems of life.

We sign below, on May 27th, 2020, for a sustainable future: