



BANDUNG SPIRIT IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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INTRODUCTION

On March 11, 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, declared the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) to be a global pandemic and called on countries to focus on five key areas: prevention, preparedness, public health, political leadership and people. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic strategy, there have been multiple adverse reactions worldwide that have exacerbated further outbreaks of COVID-19. With more than 160,000 new cases reported each day since June 25, 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic may still be in its early stages globally.¹

First, the impact of economic sanctions: Iran was one of the first countries outside of China to see a rapid increase in COVID-19 cases. Iran's health system was already affected by sanctions even before COVID-19 emerged. The impact is now severe, in part because economic sanctions limit the ability of governments to raise funds or import essential goods. This situation makes it impossible to fund the adequate prevention, diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19, and the country cannot do what other countries have done to strengthen their response measures, such as paying the full cost of access to treatment. Countries around the world are confronting the novel coronavirus pandemic, and the sanctions adopted by the United States government against other countries will only intensify the suffering of the people of those countries who are subject to such sanctions.²

Second, racial discrimination: On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African American, died after a white police officer in Minneapolis knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, during which time Floyd pleaded for his life.

It is this extreme cruelty that killed him³. An increasing number of protests against racism, police violence, and law enforcement activities have been held in the United States and around the world. These protests helped the novel coronavirus disease to spread from person to person.

Third, health resources are severely inadequate: Months after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Africa, preliminary evidence suggests that human resources for health in sub-Saharan Africa are inadequate. Community health workers do not have enough personal protective equipment to ensure that they can continue to provide basic care, and most countries are facing a severe shortage of health workers.⁴

Fourth, negative protest: The epidemic pandemic has resulted in untold suffering around the world, and it is an important test of the ability of countries to respond to crises. The response of the President of the United States, Donald Trump, to the COVID-19 crisis is not targeted towards finding an effective means of solving the problem. Rather, his response has provoked violence in the United States, and elsewhere, thereby shifting attention away from the domestic situation. Even during the outbreak, China was criticized, and attempts have been made to suppress Chinese enterprises and shutter embassies. World powers have engaged in childish "play house" games. Meanwhile, the outbreak in the United States has spiraled out of control.

Fifth, regional unrest. Yemen is facing the human catastrophe of COVID-19 in a volatile conflict zone.¹

In April 1955, at the Bandung International Conference, Premier Zhou Enlai proposed a policy of seeking common ground while putting differences to one side, which contributed to the irrefutable success of the conference, and furthermore encouraged unity and cooperation between China and Asian and African countries. The Bandung Spirit reflects a spirit of solidarity among Asian and African peoples in safeguarding world peace and enhancing friendship among their peoples. As the Director-General of the WHO stated,

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"We are all in this together, and we can only save lives together."² He made it clear that the spread of COVID-19 is not influenced by national borders and can only be controlled by extraordinary cooperation between countries, not by political differences.

While considering all of the changes that have unfolded in present-day international relations, the worst may be yet to come for much of the world. The immense global health crisis will force the world to seek common ground while putting aside differences, meaning that all countries around the world are confronted with the task of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. "Different" means that countries around the world are in different situations: they are on different developmental paths, and they have different political systems and ideologies. This approach has prompted countries around the world to take action to address the threat of emerging and re-emerging pathogens.

In the near future, negotiators from around the world will seek common ground while putting aside their differences so as to better address future global health challenges. Let Bandung spirit shine with the light of the new era.

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