

The COVID-19 Pandemic: A National and Global Social Contracts Stress Test

We commend the World Association for Social Psychiatry for its recent Position Statement (April 15, 2020) of solidarity with all its member societies and the international community in face of the unprecedented and devastating COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic is severely testing the national and global social contracts, the implicit agreements among members of our societies and among nations to cooperate for social benefits by sacrificing some individual freedoms.

The global pandemic started in Wuhan, China, in the autumn of 2019. It soon engulfed Iran, Europe, North America, and rapidly spread to Africa, Australia, and Latin America claiming millions of infected people and hundreds of thousands of deaths worldwide, as well as severely undermining the world's economies. This pandemic is affecting health, economic, educational systems, the natural habitat and the well-being of us all.

This is a unique moment in human history.

Our unequivocal interdependence, and the imperative of urgent cooperation and solidarity to face this challenge, mean that we must review and revise our social contracts, making them transparent to all and providing the necessary enforcement mechanisms for their sustainability and effectiveness as well as correcting the inequities revealed by the pandemic stress test.

Since the pandemic's impact affected practically all systems worldwide, it is urgent that a review and revision of the responsibilities and authority of all the United Nations agencies take place, including, of course, the World Health Organization (WHO), so that we are better prepared for any such future events.

The WHO must be empowered to develop the criteria and United Nations member states to review, adopt, and implement an Infectious Diseases Outbreaks Alert Systems under the aegis and authority of the WHO with full enforcement powers and in cooperation with all the United Nations member states.

A thorough review of health systems' performance during this unanticipated stress test should be performed, including reviewing the adequacy of the health workforce, the necessary medical instruments and supplies, a tracking national inventory, and assessing the impact of the pandemic on the health and well-being of the health workforce.

No single nation can, by itself, overcome this pandemic and/or prevent future such events.

We can and must adopt successful lessons learned from New Zealand, Kerala state of India, Taiwan, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, all led by women, as well as from male-led Czech Republic, Greece, and Vietnam to contain, mitigate, and move on past this deadly pandemic. The common denominator of their successes in containing and mitigating this pandemic included swift, focused leadership, science-based planning, empathy, and a superbly and timely executed national plan with full solidarity and engagement of their people. Their health systems performance, their superb national leadership, and the national solidarity and cooperation of their citizens are inspiring and worth emulating.

To replicate these successes globally, and to attend to the next important phase of rapid vaccines and treatments development, we must mobilize all available and necessary public, private, and philanthropic resources; state, federal, and military; the business and the faith communities; health systems, academic, and research institutions; and public health experts. Integrated into a cohesive whole, these systems must work with a restored, invigorated, empowered, and well-resourced WHO.

Decisive national leadership must complement global leadership by developing and implementing clear, unified National Plans specific to the country's regional and national needs and local conditions. Such national plans, well integrated, and appropriately resourced are essential to contain, mitigate, and defeat this virus and also to gradually restore the battered national economies. We must cooperate globally across national boundaries to revive the global economy.

Reviving the global economy depends on the development of a vaccine.

In this context, we are inspired by the European Commission President, Madame Ursula van der LEYEN, who recently led a global pledging summit involving many heads of state and global leaders to finance a global coordinated effort for rapid development and equitable distribution of vaccine, diagnostics and treatment. She was joined in that initiative by Dr. Victor DZAU, President of the National Academy of Medicine of the United States. The pledging summit which ended on June 27, was successful in receiving a total pledge of Euro 16 B.

Given the cataclysmic economic and health consequences precipitated by this pandemic, we must also review, revise, and update our social contracts at both national and global levels. We must strengthen both our health and economic systems and make their interdependence apparent,

mutually beneficial by making *TOTAL* Health for All in the 21st Century— integrating primary care, mental health and public health, a high and urgent global health and economics policy priority not only during pandemics but on an ongoing basis.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic stress test of our social contracts is also significantly affecting individuals' and populations' *TOTAL* Health, inclusive of mental health. Sustained stress and social isolation during these weeks and months markedly impact our brains, our health, and well-being.

Our brains are wired to connect and to belong.^[1]

This pandemic has markedly interfered with both. A second wave of mental health consequences is likely on its way and probably peaks in the next few weeks and months. Health systems must be prepared to respond to this second wave in an integrated and cohesive, *TOTAL* Health fashion, in solidarity across economics, and a collaborative public, private, and philanthropy resourced response.

As we reflect on developing a postpandemic better future, we must also review and revise the assumptions of the health, economics, and environment trifecta; critically reassess our production models dominated by single use disposables; they indiscriminately exploit, damage the natural environment; contribute massively to pollution; ultimately may lead to an irreversible climate change; and may increase the frequency and severity of subsequent pandemics.

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