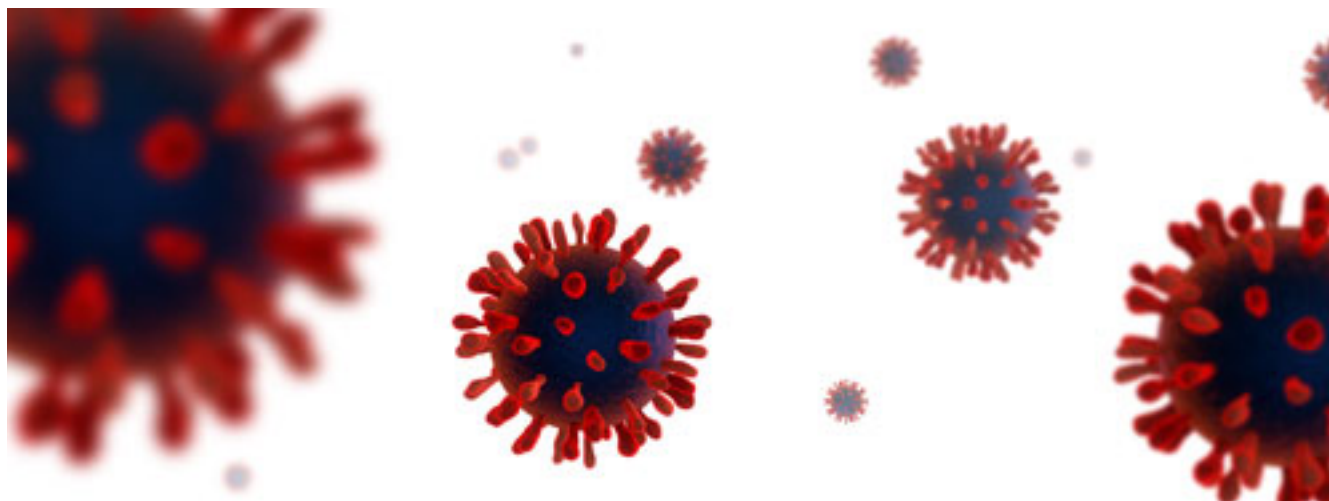




## Responding to the Pandemic, Lessons for Future Actions and Changing Priorities

Joint Statement PAS/PASS



### A Statement by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

In view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and of Social Sciences issue this communication. We note with great appreciation the tremendous services currently provided by health workers and medical professionals, including virologists and others. COVID-19 is a challenge for societies, their health systems, and economies, and especially for directly and indirectly affected people and their families. In the history of humanity, pandemics have always been tragic and have often been deadlier than wars. Today thanks to science, our knowledge is more advanced and can increasingly defend us against new forms of pandemics. Our statement intends to focus on science, science policy, and health policy actions in a broader societal context. We draw attention to the need for action, short- and long-term lessons, and future adjustments of priorities with these five points:

#### 1. **Strengthening early action and early responses:**

1. Health systems need to be strengthened in all countries. The need for early warning and early response is a lesson learned so far from the COVID-19 crisis. It is vitally important to get ahead of the curve in dealing with such global crises. We emphasize that public health measures must be initiated instantaneously in every country to combat the continuing spread of this virus. The need for testing at scale must be recognized and acted upon, and people

who test positive for COVID-19 must be quarantined, along with their close contacts.

2. We received advance warning of the outbreak a few months before it hit us on a global scale. In the future we need to better coordinate efforts on both the political and health care fronts to prepare and protect the population.
  3. Governments, public institutions, science communities, and the media (incl. social media) failed to ensure responsible, transparent, and timely communication, which is crucial for appropriate action. International organisations like WHO and UNICEF, but also academies of sciences, need to be supported in their communication efforts so that their scientific evidence-based information can rise above the cacophony of unproven assumptions spreading all over the world.
  4. Civil society must be suitably empowered, because the resolution of the present threats requires not only global cooperation but also distributed actions that can only be undertaken satisfactorily by local communities. Given that pandemics render personal face-to-face contacts impossible, efforts need to be made to apply and to further improve communications technologies.
- 2. Expanding support of science and actions by scientific communities:**
1. Strengthening basic research enhances the capacity to detect, to respond, and to ultimately prevent or at least mitigate catastrophes such as pandemics. Science needs better funding at a national and transnational level, so that scientists have the means to discover the right drugs and vaccines. Pharmaceutical companies have a key responsibility to produce those drugs at scale if possible.
  2. Scientists in all nations already tend to serve with a global perspective when generating preventions and cures. This humane attitude needs further support. Professional associations and science academies need to check whether they can serve better in cooperation with international agencies such as WHO and others, and how.
  3. An important research area is understanding the root causes and prevention of zoonotic diseases, i.e. infectious diseases caused by bacteria, viruses, or parasites that spread from animals to humans. Food-related animal production systems may need reshaping to reduce the risks of zoonotic breeding grounds. We also need to know more about the psychological foundations of human behavior in situations of collective stress, in order to decide on appropriate governance strategies in crises.
- 3. Protecting poor and vulnerable people:**
1. COVID-19 is a common threat that may harm one country sooner than another but will eventually harm us all. Health workers fighting pandemics in the front lines need the best possible support and protection. Women, who are the majority of health workers and are often most at risk, still suffer the same injustices as in other areas of work. This must stop.

2. We are concerned about the selfishness and shortsightedness of uncoordinated national responses. This is the time to prove that the “Family of Nations” (Paul VI and John Paul II) or the “Family of Peoples” (Pope Francis) are communities of values with a common origin and shared destiny.
3. Broad-based policy action in the field of public health is essential in all countries to protect poor and vulnerable people from the virus. COVID-19 will also have an adverse impact on worldwide economies. Unless mitigated, the anticipated disrupting consequences on food production and supply, and numerous other systems, will hurt especially the poor.
4. Pandemics represent a threat to the millions of refugees, migrants and forcibly displaced. We implore the global community to intensify efforts to protect the most vulnerable among us.
5. The obligatory focus on keeping COVID-19 at bay can have large consequences on those suffering from other diseases. Complex ethical issues arise at the global, national, and local level in the health practice, when first-come-first-serve action rules may break down. This is a general issue, but during a crisis it deserves special consideration as well as a joint scientific and ethical commitment.

#### **4. Shaping global interdependencies and help across and within nations:**

1. Decades of increasing interconnectedness have opened up the world to massive cross-border flows of goods, services, money, ideas, and people. Under normal circumstances these developments enhance the wellbeing and prosperity of large proportions of the world’s population. Under abnormal circumstances, however, we experience the adverse consequences and fragility of interconnectedness. The sheer scale and scope of the current globalism has made the world unprecedentedly interdependent – and thus vulnerable and dysfunctional during crises. For example, the COVID-19 outbreak is prompting demand for more national isolation. However, seeking protection through isolationism would be misguided and counterproductive. A trend worth backing would be a strong demand for greater global cooperation. Transnational and international organizations need to be equipped and supported to serve that purpose.
2. Only governance based on sound scientific evidence and a solid basis of shared fundamental values can mitigate the consequences of such crises. Unless governments reduce their nationalistic interests, there is reason to expect a worsening of the health crisis and consequently a deep global recession, with profound and tragic implications especially for poor countries.
3. Mitigation measures to curb the rapid spread of contagion sometimes require closing borders around affected hotspots. Nevertheless, national borders must not become barriers hindering help across nations. Human resources, equipment, knowledge about best practices, treatments, and supplies must be shared.
4. Global problems such as pandemics or the less visible crises of global climate change and biodiversity loss demand global cooperative responses. We must take into account the

relationships between human activities, global ecology and livelihoods. Once COVID-19 is under control, we cannot go back to business as usual. A thorough review of worldviews, lifestyles, and short-term economic valuations must be carried out to cope with the challenges of the Anthropocene. A more responsible, more sharing, more equalitarian, more caring and fairer society is required if we are to survive.

5. We insist that global crises demand collective action. The prevention and containment of pandemics is a *global public good* (*Laudato Si'*) and protecting it requires increased global coordination as well as temporary and adaptive decoupling. At a time when rule-based multilateralism is declining, the COVID-19 crisis should encourage efforts to bring about a new – in the sense of different – globalization model aimed at inclusive protection of all.

## 5. Strengthening solidarity and compassion:

1. Apart from a scientific, technical and health policy agenda, we must not forget social cohesion. Churches, as well as all faith- and value-based communities, are called to action.
2. A lesson the virus is teaching us is that freedom cannot be enjoyed without responsibility and solidarity. Freedom divorced from solidarity breeds pure and destructive egoism. Nobody can succeed alone. The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to become more conscious of how important good relationships are in our lives.
3. Today's paradox is that we realize that each person needs to cooperate with other people at the exact same time as it becomes necessary to isolate ourselves from everyone else for health reasons. However, this paradox is only apparent since the act of staying at home is an act of profound solidarity. It is to “love your neighbor as yourself”. The lesson the pandemic teaches us is that, without solidarity, freedom and equality are just empty words (Pope Francis).

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