



FUND FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Our Declaration on the COVID-19 pandemic

from the Board of Directors to the Member States

March 26, 2020

We are living in extraordinary times on the planet. The onset of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and its accelerated expansion have not only led to the declaration of a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), but also highlights how fragile health services are, and how defenselessness most vulnerable populations are around the planet. Pandemics affect different population groups in different ways, exacerbating the inequalities that already exist in society.

In the case of Latin America, this health emergency has led governments to take measures to prevent the spread of this disease. These measures range from declarations of quarantine, border closures, social isolation, and strengthening of health systems, among others, seeking to protect the entire population.

However, our region, due to high levels of inequality and poverty, presents an additional challenge, since a large portion of the population lives in conditions of extreme vulnerability, including predominantly indigenous peoples. These conditions translate into high rates of malnutrition, inaccessibility to health services, precarious infrastructure and low visibility.

In this context, our Indigenous Peoples have maintained a highly developed in-

stitutional and social structure, in addition to possessing traditional knowledge known as Traditional Ancestral Medicine developed within the framework of our cosmovisions. Our own Health Systems are an intrinsic part of the Good Living paradigm and are oriented to the care of diverse ecosystems that coexist in balance, always in relation to the territorial community context and the coexistence that involves both the relations with the community and with nature. But these Systems function on the basis of coexistence and community practices that are also at risk in the face of policies that disrupt –even if involuntarily– this coexistence.

The Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (FILAC), is an international organization created following an equal participation of representatives of the Indigenous Peoples and their respective governments, with the objective of ensuring respect for the individual and collective rights of the Indigenous Peoples, in addition to promoting processes for their self-development. Based on this mandate, in constant dialogue and coordination with the Indigenous Peoples of the Abya Yala, FILAC is permanently monitoring the evolution of the Covid-19 pandemic, identifying mechanisms that encourage processes of broad and con-



stant dialogue between governments and the indigenous communities, given that the pandemic requires governments to take the necessary measures to prevent contagion and to treat the disease and its respective complications, in accordance with the recommendations of the PAHO/WHO.

For this reason, the declarations made by several States expressing the inadequacy of health systems, are of concern, as they do not have the necessary or sufficient capacity to attend to their entire population, given the complex existing socio-economic conditions and evident social inequities. At the present time, this is due not only to the limited availability of economic resources for public health, but also to the speed of the pandemic's spread, which puts intense pressure on the health system to respond to the cases detected.

This pandemic finds us in a really vulnerable health situation as a region and as affected Indigenous Peoples. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate and characterize the vulnerabilities that affect the indigenous population the most in order to better focus efforts on the containment and control of the pandemic. Thus, we have identified four major vulnerable groups:

- Indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation who, by their very condition of isolation, have immune systems that are much more fragile in the face of external pathogens;
- Indigenous populations living in urban centers are mostly located in slums, without access to, among others, basic water or sewage services;

- Many Indigenous Peoples lost or have seen their original life systems weakened, changing their food and eating patterns, resulting in a change in their epidemiological profiles and now face the emergence of new diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, gastric dysfunctions, cancer, etc.; and
- In many regions of the continent, mainly in the lowlands, people are facing the most serious epidemic of dengue and malaria, which affects the indigenous communities gravely due to climatic and territorial conditions there.

It is clear that the course of the pandemic will depend on the decisions taken by Governments. According to reports for the region, our communities have remained impoverished and in a situation of great social and economic vulnerability, whose unfavorable health conditions will have a negative impact during this ongoing pandemic. Therefore, we emphatically call on governments to involve all Indigenous Peoples in the development of policies and strategies to respond to Covid-19.

Adopting the Primary Health Care Strategy of Alma Ata (USSR, 1978), we call for an integrated approach between modern medicine and traditional community-based medicine. An approach that guides us towards universal and free health systems with a model of care based on interculturality and cultural ethnic diversity, which recognizes ancestral knowledge in the construction of an integral health model that respects cultural identity and living ancestry within our indigenous communities. It also promotes the Health of Ecosystems and the



Health of Mother Earth towards achieving the Good Living.

Those are guidelines that lead us in the search for proposals based on the reality of our Indigenous Peoples; however, we also find, from our own historical and ancestral memory, the strength of Traditional Ancestral Medicine as a mean of cultural resistance, to preserve identities and spiritual relationships, nurturing harmony, affection and respect among the beings that have been raised by and inhabit our Mother Earth.

FILAC, concerned with the vulnerability of Indigenous Peoples, considers important the constant and permanent promotion of discussions between governments and Indigenous Peoples, as a measure to confront the Covid-19 pandemic. Within this framework, it offers to work as an intermediary in these dialogues, in order to promote proposals and contributions to confront the pandemic coming from the indigenous organizations of each country.

Considering that it is necessary to inform and also prevent the spread of the pandemic in indigenous territories and that this information requires appropriate cultural context, FILAC offers immediate access to our different networks and means of communication available, as well as appropriate translations of the different messages being developed by the member countries.

The following is a summary of the various proposals collected from both large and small indigenous organizations and

youth groups from Abya Yala, aimed at strengthening the interventions based on their requirements:

- Prioritizing the most vulnerable indigenous communities.
- Characterizing the main vulnerabilities.
- Reinforcing the health fence in communities with voluntary isolation.
- Paying special and priority attention to the communities in the Amazon that face great difficulty in terms of territorial access and medical assistance. Taking strict care of the health fence.
- Creating local health committees in urban areas, involving the active community participation of community leaders and health agents from traditional ancestral medicine, for the prevention and treatment of patients with Covid-19.
- Providing the infrastructure and inputs necessary for the care and treatment of Covid-19, to health care centers within indigenous territories.
- Carrying out a massive media campaign through radio, television and social networks, with accurate information, translated into the local indigenous language that is widely disseminated.
- Promoting methods and treatments from local Traditional Ancestral Medicine, within each territory, together with their medicinal plants, ancestral food and rituals for Mother Earth and the well-being of the community.

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- Respecting, preserving and guaranteeing healthy and clean water sources for consumption by the communities, as part of the strategy of prevention and treatment of Covid-19.
 - Securing the supply and free transit of healthy food, which is free of agrochemicals, emphasizing the local ancestral food base that includes non-conventional food plants, for the care and feeding of the community, as a method of prevention.
 - Respecting the free, prior and informed consent, as a right of Indigenous Peoples that should be considered in the development of preventive measures of Covid-19.
 - Promoting solidarity and complementarity as one of the deepest ancestral values of Indigenous Peoples.
 - Executing protection actions for indigenous peoples who have lost their crops, have difficulties in moving food due to the conditions of the water and land communication routes and will not have resources for their households given the actions being taken to prevent and combat the Coronavirus in rural regions.
 - Promoting the recovery of community values of coexistence and harmony with Mother Earth.
 - Organizing permanent spaces of dialogue between the government and indigenous peoples to define medium- and long-term actions to address the impacts of the Coronavirus in indigenous territories and the approval of public policies that address the socio-economic needs resulting from the pandemic in their communities.

La Paz, March 26, 2020.