



SOCIAL FORUM
11 – 12 October 2021
Room XVII, Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland

**“GOOD PRACTICES, SUCCESS STORIES, LESSONS LEARNED AND
CHALLENGES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC,
WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND
SOLIDARITY, AND FROM A HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE”**

Keynote panel: General discussion

Oral statement delivered by: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII (APG23)

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The COVID -19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities within and across countries fading the likelihood of implementation of the SDGs. The greatest adverse effects are falling once more on countries and people least able to protect themselves, and already at the greatest risk of being left behind.

As the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres recently said¹: “We are at a pivotal moment. The choices we make now could put us on a path towards breakdown and a future of perpetual crisis; or breakthrough to a greener and a safer world.” Nearly two years into this pandemic, we are confronted with a very sad reality whereby more than 100 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty while pharmaceutical CEOs are among nine new COVID-19 billionaires. The vaccine apartheid is a scandal with seventy-five percent of all COVID-19 vaccine doses gone to just ten countries. The moral failure of the world’s leaders has never been so evident. This emergency, coupled with environmental change, unequal power structures, demographic changes, and gender inequality has suddenly unfolded the gaps and downfalls of the political and social drivers of health and the national and international structural obstacles to sustainable development.

APG23 firmly believes that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are not irreversible as long as swift action is taken towards fostering international cooperation without conditions, applying the lens of the right to development in formulating policies and programs as well as providing the principle of international solidarity with a legal dimension.

We need urgent action: debt cancellation, ending unilateral coercive measures, countering tax havens and corruption, public health systems strengthening, democratic reforms of financial institutions, fair aid, trade and investments, transfer of technology, financing for development, reducing military expenditures with the redirection of the released resources towards social protection are, among others, all measures needed to counteract the existing inequities. Moreover, States should deliver on their commitments to release 0.7% of their GNI for Official

Development Assistance and most urgently to approve the TRIPS waiver under the auspice of the World Trade Organization in order to guarantee free and universal access to the COVID-19 vaccines and the tools required to control the pandemic.

Finally, we would like to emphasize the crucial role that we, as civil society and peoples of the world have in all this. Learning from the past, civil society activism and resilience has been central pressure gear in the global responses' machinery activated to address HIV/AIDS epidemics worldwide. Today, we are called to do the same. We must be in that same gear together and right now!