JOINT SUMMIT WORKING GROUP OEA/Ser.E

Meeting of High-Level Authorities GTCC/doc.75/20

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**FINAL REPORT**

Second Meeting of High-Level Authorities of the Joint Summit Working Group
on the impact of COVID-19 in the Americas

1. **Welcoming remarks by the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS) and Chair of the Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG)[[1]](#endnote-2)**

The Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS), Mr. Luis Almagro, thanked the participants for their exchanges of ideas and noted that the Organization’s political bodies had been dealing with the agenda topics because of the central importance of the COVID-19 issue to the member states. He also spoke of the invitation extended to subregional agencies, such as the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and the importance of taking account of their needs. He noted that the OAS had launched a portal of forums and queries for the post-pandemic period and made it available to the member states, and he extended an invitation to the other organizations to participate in it.

The goal of the meeting was to provide an update on the region’s status vis-à-vis the COVID-19 pandemic and to share information on recent actions undertaken by the JSWG members in the region.

Secretary General Almagro welcomed the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru, H.E. Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, in his capacity as Chair of the Summits of the Americas Process.

1. **Address by the Chair of the Summits of the Americas Process**

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru, H.E. Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, greeted the participants and thanked the OAS Secretary General for convening the meeting. He referred to the measures adopted by the Government of Peru to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis and said that they represented a fiscal effort of around 12% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He highlighted the enormous challenges that the region’s countries will have to face and underscored the need to rebuild trust in multilateralism to cope with the devastating effects of the crisis; the central task to be shouldered by the member states, he said, was strengthening the institutions of the multilateral system in order to assure their greater effectiveness. He added that the organizations’ contributions to health matters—as well as to development financing, agriculture, and migration issues—must be effective and occupy a privileged position to ensure cooperation that benefits the member states.

Peru’s Foreign Minister also spoke of the need to tackle the issue of funding through renewed domestic and international social compacts. The region requires the multilateral entities’ commitment toward working on innovative solutions to deal with the effects of the crisis, alleviating its impact on economies and vulnerable populations so that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can be attained.

He concluded by restating the need for the JSWG to design comprehensive and coordinated proposals to support the member states’ ongoing efforts to combat the pandemic.

1. **Remarks by Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, Director of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), on the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic**

Dr. Carissa Etienne, the Director of PAHO, greeted the authorities representing the JSWG institutions and provided an update of the health situation in the region.

* As of April 28, more than 1.2 million cases and 68,000 deaths had been reported in the Americas. All 54 countries and territories of the Americas had reported cases. Most of the new cases continued to come from the United States, which accounted for around 82% of all the region’s cases and deaths.
* Other countries reporting significant increases in their recently confirmed cases over the past 24 hours included Brazil (a 6% increase), Peru (9%), Canada (3%), and Mexico (8%).
* Twelve countries of the Americas were experiencing community transmission: the United States, Brazil, Canada, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Colombia, Argentina, and Puerto Rico.
* The total number of cases registered in Ecuador had recently doubled, after almost 11,000 samples pending confirmation gave positive results for COVID-19. She said it had been estimated that the number of COVID-19 deaths in Ecuador could be several times greater than the figure indicated in the official report.
* The PAHO member states were participating in several global initiatives, including the *Solidarity Trial* and *Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator*.
* Priority response actions on which the countries were working:
1. Real-time information, coordination, and response operations.
2. Limiting person-to-person transmission and preventing transmission amplification events.
3. Early identification, isolation, and treatment of patients.
4. Communicating critical information about risks and events and counteracting incorrect information.
5. Research, innovation, and development.
* PAHO provides direct hotlines to health ministries and other national authorities for monitoring, laboratory capacity, medical care services, infection prevention and control, clinical management, and communication about risks in keeping with the priority lines of action.
* PAHO has provided direct technical assistance to all the member states through its country offices and has deployed expert missions on laboratory training, clinical management, infection prevention and control, monitoring, reorganizing health services, research, and outbreak response (including contact tracing and cadaver handling).
* Global supply chain for COVID-19: PAHO has participated in two of the three major consortiums for diagnoses and protective equipment, and it is about to be formally included in the Global Supply Chain Task Force in order to be able to access supplies and logistics using the PAHO Strategic Fund mechanism.
* The Strategic Fund is a regional technical cooperation mechanism for joint purchases of essential drugs and strategic health supplies that has clearly defined communications channels and procedures with health ministries, links to national regulatory agencies, and other leading national and international stakeholders to facilitate the acquisition and customs clearance of health supplies bought on the countries’ behalf.
* 33 member states in the Americas have signed agreements to use the Strategic Fund, and 12 countries are currently using the Fund to secure access to supplies for tackling COVID-19.
* Further interventions are taking place in the following areas: laboratory tests and supplies were purchased by PAHO for 36 countries and territories of the Americas, 14 tons of personal protective equipment were delivered to PAHO by 26 countries in 45 shipments, strengthening of health systems, epidemic intelligence, and public health measures.

The main current challenges in the response to COVID-19 are:

* Infection prevention and control in health care facilities due to a market failure in the production and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE).
* Limited capacity for testing, particularly on account of the low availability of molecular tests to identify the presence of the virus in patients.
* Low availability of hospital beds and ICU beds.
* A high number of countries faced with social and economic challenges are trying to emerge from lockdowns and certain other social distancing measures. PAHO teams are working with the member states to provide the best evidence-based guidance.
* The tight focus on the pandemic response has diverted necessary resources from other critical health services, including inoculation programs.
* Harassment and attacks against health workers.

Finally, Dr. Etienne spoke of the cancellation of resources for the regular fund, special contributions, and specific funds for addressing the COVID-19 situation, which she said severely limited the ability of PAHO to continue to provide the member states with technical support.

1. **Presentation by the High Authorities of the JSWG and invited subregional organizations regarding steps taken to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in the region**

The Secretary General of the OAS, Mr. Luis Almagro, invited the JSWG member organizations to report on their recent efforts to mitigate COVID-19.

* 1. **Remarks by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)**

Ms. Alicia Bárcena, the Executive Secretary of ECLAC, spoke of the launch of the “[COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean: economic and social impact](https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19),” and of the organization’s information-gathering work, which had allowed it to forecast an economic contraction of at least 5.3%, representing the region’s deepest recession since 1914. She also noted that the forecasts indicated a 15% decrease in trade and an unemployment figure of 12 million workers. Of particular concern was the informality rate of around 53%, together with the weakness of social protection networks.

ECLAC and ILO were working together on a document to examine labor issues in the region.

Meetings with Caribbean ministers of social development and finance had reaffirmed the impossibility of further indebtedness, and requests had been made for concessionary funds and debt relief or cancellation.

ECLAC also described how the region’s countries were making a major fiscal effort to assist their people (12% of GDP in Peru, 5% of GDP in Chile), aiding the most vulnerable segments of their populations with cash transfers and other instruments. As regards the steps that the countries are taking to reopen their economies, the international agencies are in a position to provide them with technical guidelines and specific instructions for scaling back their lockdown measures.

Ms. Bárcena also said that the current situation offered an opportunity for reflection on the post-COVID 19 scenario for issues relating to regional integration, production networks, and economic systems. To conclude, ECLAC shared its special COVID-19 reports:

* [Special Report No. 1: Latin America and the Caribbean and the COVID-19 pandemic: Economic and social effects.](https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/45351-latin-america-and-caribbean-and-covid-19-pandemic-economic-and-social-effects)
* [Special Report No. 2: Measuring the impact of COVID-19 with a view to reactivation.](https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/45477-measuring-impact-covid-19-view-reactivation)
	1. **Remarks by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)**

The OECD Secretary-General, Mr. Ángel Gurría, thanked Secretary General Almagro for convening this second meeting; he also expressed his gratitude to Peru’s Foreign Minister, Mr. Meza-Cuadra, and to the Director of PAHO, Dr. Carissa F. Etienne, for their remarks.

Mr. Gurría reported that since the previous high-level meeting on April 3, the OECD had made available a large number of new policy notes on the *Digital Hub*. In particular, he spoke of the region’s response, the socioeconomic implications, and the policy priorities in the immediate, short, and medium terms.

The Secretary-General of the OECD noted that as a contribution to this effort, the OECD had produced several publications on the main challenges in four key dimensions—health, economy, social/inequality, and governance—and on some efforts made at the regional level, underscoring the OECD’s potential contribution.

* [COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Overview of Government Responses to the Crisis](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=129_129907-eae84sciov&title=COVID-19-in-Latin-Amercia-and-the-Caribbean_An-overview-of-government-responses-to-the-crisis)
* [COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional socio-economic implications and policy priorities](https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=129_129904-k3xp17fqbl&title=COVID-19-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean-Regional-socio-economic-implications-and-policy-priorities)

The OECD Secretary-General concluded his address by emphasizing “The need to coordinate efforts and to implement a collective strategy within the JSWG, leveraging the capacities of each member institution.”

* 1. **Remarks by the World Bank**

The OAS Secretary General gave the floor to the World Bank’s acting Vice President for Latin America and Caribbean, Mr. Luis Humberto López, who greeted the participants and expressed his gratitude for the invitation. He then proceeded to discuss four issues related to the work of the World Bank:

* *Economic forecasts.* ECLAC has already given an idea of the contraction expected this year, and the IMF, the IDB, and the World Bank all suggest a 5% drop in GDP, with a downward trend over the coming weeks. Beyond the shifts in GDP, it must also be borne in mind that the economic crisis will have a major impact on unemployment, poverty, and other social variables.
* *Reopening economies.* The current situation combines a health crisis with an economic crisis, and when attention is paid to one of those, the problem is that the other worsens. Although reopening the economy is necessary, caution is needed, since the decisive factor is consumption. The experiences of countries such as China, Italy, Spain, Germany, and some states in the United States, which have already begun to reopen their economies, should inform the decisions of the region’s countries.
* *Spring meetings of the World Bank and the IMF.* Some measures were approved, such as a moratorium on official bilateral debt service for low-income countries. Some countries and other entities have also called for this moratorium to be extended to the multilateral credit agencies and to middle-income countries. When such calls are made, it must be borne in mind that the multilateral entities are, in many cases, the sole source of financing for some countries. It is important to avoid initiatives that could entail a worsening of credit ratings and consequently restrict the resources that could be channeled into the region. Although the funds of the IDA and of the IBRD are kept separate within the World Bank, that is not the case in other multilateral banks, which greatly complicates matters.

In concluding, Mr. López explained that the World Bank had divided its interventions in the region into three phases. The first phase focuses on the health emergency, to assist countries in acquiring the supplies they need to deal with the crisis. The second phase addresses liquidity to support all those countries making major expenditure to address the crisis and the revenues of which are falling as a result of economic standstill, under the leadership of both the IMF and the IDB through their liquidity support instruments.

The World Bank is concentrating its efforts on the third phase of recovery, during which the countries will be heavily affected and with high levels of debt, which could restrict their margin for maneuvering during that stage. It will therefore be essential, he said, for economies to be attractive to the private sector. The region’s countries must adopt measures to promote business and streamline regulations to encourage investment.

Finally, he spoke of the need to maintain an extremely active dialogue with the countries and to strengthen cooperative ties, to ensure they are prepared for the crisis and able to overcome it.

* 1. **Remarks by the Latin American Development Bank (CAF)**

The Secretary General of CAF, Mr. Víctor Rico, spoke of CAF’s contributions along four lines:

1. Activation of a contingency line of credit of US$ 50 million per country. To date, that line of credit has been requested by eight CAF shareholder countries.
2. Emergency line of credit for the region’s countries. A rapidly disbursable emergency line of credit for countercyclical purposes; demand outstripped the US$ 2.5 billion initially made available, with requests totaling US$ 3.25 billion.
3. Redirection of approved funding operations to address the crisis.
4. Support measures for the private sector and businesses.

Secretary General Rico agreed with the notion that the region was facing an unprecedented crisis that demanded innovative and extraordinary measures. He maintained that it was an optimal moment for international cooperation, and so nontraditional support options had to be identified.

In connection with the debate between measures to protect health and measures to protect the economy, CAF believes that countries will begin to increase the flexibility of their lockdown measures, in the opposite direction to what the protocols recommend, even in the absence of identification tests, and that is a reality for which the Bank has to be prepared so it can help the region’s countries.

Finally, Mr. Rico reported that CAF was offering assistance for the formulation of policies to enable the countries to begin a process of rapid economic recovery and to address the levels of unemployment they are about to face.

Following Mr. Rico’s intervention, the Secretary General of the OAS, Mr. Luis Almagro, offered the floor of the meeting to the authorities from the two subregional JSWG observer entities invited to attend.

* 1. **Remarks by the Central American Integration System (SICA)**

The OAS Secretary General gave the floor to Mr. Vinicio Cerezo, Secretary General of SICA and former President of Guatemala, who said that the Central American countries had been quick to adopt decisions to prevent the infection of their populations and the consequent deterioration of health services. He spoke of a meeting called by SICA with the Central American region’s presidents that had agreed on the drafting of a Regional Contingency Plan by SICA’s Ministerial Councils, for adoption by the foreign ministers. This plan covers three objectives:

1. Creating local continuity actions.
2. Combining efforts to react immediately to health challenges.
3. Socioeconomic and financial forecasting.

The Regional Contingency Plan is equipped with an emergency fund of US$ 1,900 to assist in three areas: (1) construction of hospital infrastructure and medical equipment, with the fund enabling the purchase of 25,000 tests per country, (2) joint procurement of drugs to leverage economies of scale and reduce costs, while maintaining intraregional trade, and (3) mobilizing contributions from multiple sectors of society and the economy to support the government’s measures.

Secretary General Cerezo concluded by emphasizing the importance of bringing the JSWG organizations together at this meeting to exchange information and discuss the impact of the measures that will have to be adopted.

The OAS Secretary General then offered the floor to the Assistant Secretary General of the OAS, Nestor Mendez. In his address, Ambassador Nestor Mendez described the JSWG as an invaluable forum for major regional players to exchange information. He thanked the subregional organizations that had been invited to attend the meeting: the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the Central American Integration System (SICA), and the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA).

The OAS Assistant Secretary General also said that given the dimension of the crisis, it was important for all the members of the Inter-American system to be able to exchange information and coordinate actions, despite overlaps between the constituent countries and the membership.

* 1. **Remarks by the Association of Caribbean States (ACS)**

The General Secretary of ACS, Dr. June Soomer, expressed her gratitude for the invitation for the Association to attend the meeting. She said that under the leadership of Barbados, ACS had focused its efforts on cooperation and coordination for the development of resilience and social and economic recovery in both the member states and associate members.

 She reported that since the first Special Meeting of ACS Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Health Ministers on COVID-19, held on-line on March 24, 2020, coordination had taken place with CARICOM, SELA, SICA, SIECA, ECLAC Port Statistics, and the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO).

In order to pursue a regional strategy for COVID-19 focused on Caribbean Basin integration and South-South cooperation, a number of priorities have been established:

* Joint procurement of equipment to fight COVID-19.
* A COVID-19 dashboard, to be implemented at the regional technical meeting on Monday, May 4. This interactive platform will be used to share COVID-19 statistics and best practices and to assess shortcomings so that better political decisions can be adopted.
* Strengthening partnerships with stakeholders from various sectors responsible for tourism, trade, transportation, and disaster risk reduction, ahead of the hurricane season.
* Capacity building for managing COVID-19.

Dr. Soomer emphasized the need to construct short-, medium-, and long-term resilience covering such topics as value chains and new sources for foodstuffs, new trade ties and shipping routes, increased transportation, and new tourism markets. She also reported on the design of regional plans to assist vulnerable groups.

She agreed this was an opportunity to build more equitable societies as the social and economic recovery takes place, since those efforts could not follow the current paradigm that denies countries and citizens access to resources.

In concluding, she underscored the need to bring regional organizations together to coordinate the region’s limited resources.

* 1. **Remarks by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)**

Mr. Jorge Werthein, the Special Advisor to the Director General, offered his congratulations on this initiative enabling the various organizations to share their experiences.

He noted the joint responsibility of the private sector in the crisis management and recovery efforts. IICA has held meetings with several multinationals in the region, such as Wal-Mart, Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, Cargill, Bayer, Danone, and Corteva, to secure their support for the post-pandemic phase. At the same time, the IDB presented the recommendations of the Business Dialogue of the Americas (ABD) on policies for addressing the coronavirus pandemic and mitigating its impact.

IICA stated that the Caribbean was a region of primary concern, and that the absence of tourism will aggravate the scenario and cause extreme difficulties.

Another issue that has received attention, he said, was the agricultural trade: in spite of the restrictions put in place, free crossborder circulation has been allowed, as a result of which food supplies have been maintained and regions have been able to share their surpluses.

* 1. **Remarks by the International Labour Organization (ILO)**

Mr. Vinicius Pinheiro, ILO’s Assistant Director General and Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, spoke of the crisis caused by the pandemic as an opportunity to support employment policies, companies, and incomes. He said that labor ministers were on the front line in the immediate response to the pandemic and that massive investments in incomes, companies, and employment were needed.

He indicated that job security was a key issue and, to that end, work was underway on sectoral protocols to support the countries in those areas. Finally, he underscored the importance of social dialogue, which was bringing companies and workers together in decision-making forums.

* 1. **Remarks by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

In his address, Mr. Luis Felipe López Calva, the Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, said that UNDP’s assistance to countries was focused on analyses and on operational support for situation rooms and support for making use of international cooperation resources. It had also made a facility available, which was supporting 20 of the region’s countries.

The United Nations system’s document on socioeconomic recovery had also been launched, charging UNDP with the technical leadership of the country teams.

The economic outlook will depend on the epidemiological dynamics, which demands innovative responses with an emphasis on interdisciplinary work.

Finally, he said that this crisis was an opportunity to rethink government credibility, but taking care that democratic controls were not weakened in the process, and he called for emphasis to be placed on social participation and for consensus regarding exit policies.

* 1. **Remarks by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)**

Mr. Fabrizio Opertti, Manager of the IDB’s Integration and Trade Sector, underscored the need to bolster multilateralism and to ensure alignment in the interventions undertaken. The IDB, he said, was focusing its efforts along four central lines: the health response, support for vulnerable populations, defense of the productive fabric, and support for fiscal policies.

He referred to three recent IDB publications:

* [Policies to Fight the Pandemic: 2020 Latin American and Caribbean Macroeconomic Report](https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/2020_Latin_American_and_Caribbean_Macroeconomic_Report_Policies_to_Fight_the_Pandemic.pdf)
* [Public Policy to Tackle Covid-19: Recommendations for Latin America and the Caribbean](https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Public-Policy-to-Tackle-Covid-19-Recommendations-for--Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf)
* [Americas Business Dialogue (ABD) Policy Recommendations on addressing the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and mitigating its impacts](https://americasbd.org/covid19/index.html)

Mr. Opertti spoke about the importance of diversifying the region’s value chains in the current situation as an opportunity for economic growth. In that regard, he referred to the [ConnectAmericas](https://connectamericas.com/company/connectamericas) network, a business-oriented social network of the Americas dedicated to the promotion of foreign trade and international investment.

* 1. **Remarks by the International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

Mr. Luca Dall’Oglio, Chief of Mission at the IOM’s office in Washington, D.C., highlighted the long-term humanitarian and socioeconomic impact that the pandemic will have in the region. Since the last meeting of the JSWG institutions, IOM has been focused on addressing the most urgent effects of the crisis. He stated that the decisions taken by governments to contain the virus had repercussions on population mobility. He further noted that one of the greatest challenges involved the migrants trapped at borders, particularly in the countries of the Northern Triangle, Peru, Chile, and Panama. IOM was working in coordination with other agencies of the United Nations system.

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In addition, he said that IOM was pursuing interventions to mitigate the serious health and socioeconomic effects of the pandemic in order to deploy COVID-19 mitigation efforts in humanitarian environments and other contexts where people in movement are likely to face severe impacts. Those efforts are in line with the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan and with the COVID-19 Plan of the World Health Organization (WHO).

The IOM response plan is focused on four strategic priorities: (1) effective coordination and partnerships, and monitoring of human mobility, (2) preparation and response measures to reduce morbidity and mortality, (3) efforts to ensure that affected people have access to basic services, essential goods, and protection, and (4) mitigation of the socioeconomic repercussions of COVID-19.

Further details on the efforts carried out by the JSWG organizations in response to the COVID-19 crisis can be found at: <http://scm.oas.org/pdfs/2020/SUMMIT/GTCCCOVID19.PDF>

1. **Conclusions**

The Secretary General of the OAS, Mr. Luis Almagro, thanked all the participants and invited Dr. Carissa Etienne to share some final comments. Dr. Etienne thanked the institutions for their solidarity and highlighted that coordinated work will be necessary in the future in order to address the pandemic. She said that the countries had to take economic and health considerations into account in their decision-making.

In addition, Dr. Etienne again called on the institutions to consider the situation with PAHO’s funds, given the 60% reduction in contributions to the Regular Fund that it is facing and that will seriously affect its interventions. The Director of PAHO issued a particular call to the JSWG high authorities present at the meeting to consider that situation going forward.

Following Dr. Etienne’s address, the Secretary General of the OAS brought the meeting to its close.

1. . The Joint Summit Working Group (JSWG) comprises the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Bank, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Latin American Development Bank (CAF), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABIE), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)