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**Statement of Luis Felipe Lopez-Calva, Assistant Secretary General and UNDP Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean at the Organization of American States High Level Meeting to Address Regional Impact of the COVID-19**

My regards and gratitude to the Secretary-General of Organization of American States, Luis Almagro, for the opportunity to provide the following statement at the Organization of American States High Level Meeting to Address the Regional Impact of the COVID-19.

**Context**

Latin America and the Caribbean has over 23,000 cases confirmed as of 2 April 2020. Every country in the region now has confirmed cases and nine countries have surpassed 1,000 cases, including Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Dominican Republic Mexico, Panama, Peru and Columbia. In terms of cases by 100,000 people, Panama is the country in the region with the most cases, at 32.

We observe large heterogeneity in the region in terms of capacity to test, which partly explains large uncertainty on the extent and dynamic of the problem. Just to give you an example, while Brazil has 5 times more reported cases than Mexico, it has administered over 10 times more tests.

LAC is a region characterized by low growth, high inequality and high levels of informality. The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 will be compounded with these existing vulnerabilities and have a disproportionate effect on the poorest. Most governments in the region have responded with strict social distancing measures to flatten the epidemiological curve, which will result in a deep recession. The consensus forecasts are at -3 to -4%, and it is not until 2022 that the region is expected to go back to its pre-crisis output levels in scenarios that foresee a U-shaped crisis pattern.

In terms of social distancing policies, most governments have closed schools, imposed curfews, typically between 19-5hrs, and banned entry for non-nationals (borders have remained open for merchandise). Some have imposed mandatory country-wide lockdowns (i.e. restricting all movement of individuals) as in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru.

To limit the effects that social distancing measures have on the economy, countries in the region have put placed exceptions on social security contributions (for instance, Argentina and Peru); allowed unemployment insurance claims without breaks in labor relations (Chile), deferred firms tax payments (for instance, Mexico and Haiti), and distributed lump-sum cash transfers (US$150 in Argentina, US$65 in Chile, US$40 in Colombia , US$110 in Peru). Challenges remain in terms of targeting benefits and reaching the informal sector.

**The UN Development System and UNDP’s Response**

As Co-Chair of the Regional UN Development System, together with Alicia Barcena, Executive Secretary of ECLAC, we have conducted a series of meetings with Regional Directors of Agencies, Funds and Programmes to discuss the UN System’s integrated response to the evolving situation in the region. Earlier this week we also held a meeting with the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina J. Mohammed, to discuss our coherent and multisectoral response.

As UNDP in LAC, we are in the mist of supporting countries in preparing, responding and recovering from this crisis. UNDP COs in LAC are engaging closely with government counterparts, offering timely and relevant policy and programmatic support, as well as facilitating procurement process for testing kits, protective personnel equipment and other medical equipment. UNDP has received requests for support from twenty-three governments in the region. Programmatic requests are varied and include hiring and training of medical personnel, conducting economic and social impact analysis, supporting governance issues, mitigating the impact on gender violence, and supporting communication strategies to reduce the impact of fake news and ensure that the most vulnerable populations receive adequate and timely information. It is also worth noting that most COs are also exploring alternatives to support the implementation of IFIs funds.

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For example, in Paraguay, in partnership with CAF, UNDP delivered approximately 200,000 surgical masks to the Ministry of Public Health and Social Well-Being. In Bolivia, UNDP supported the government in the acquisition of testing equipment for COVID-19. In Uruguay, UNDP is supporting the government with a communication campaign to stop the spread of misinformation regarding the virus. UNDP Accelerator Labs[[1]](#footnote-1) in LAC are also engaging with governments to support their efforts in new and innovative ways. In Paraguay, for example, they are crowdsourcing solutions to mitigate the impact of the crisis on the informal sector.

At the regional level we have launched a [*Series of COVID-19 Policy Papers*](https://www.latinamerica.undp.org/content/rblac/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/evidence--experience--and-pertinence-in-search-for-effective-pol.html)*,* to promote a collective reflection on the response to the Covid-19 health crisis and its economic and social effects on our societies. The series includes regional level analysis, as well as papers analyzing the socio-economic impact of the crises at the country level. This series also contributes to the integrated approach established by the UN reform and aspires to become an important input into the coherent response of the United Nations development system at the global, regional, and national levels.

Allow me to close by celebrating this important initiative to address the regional impact of COVID-19 and expressing our strong commitment to continue to engage and collaborate with it.

1. In Argentina, Barbados, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico and Paraguay [↑](#footnote-ref-1)