



GROUP OF FRIENDS
IN DEFENSE OF THE
CHARTER OF THE
UNITED NATIONS

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY H.E. MR. JOAQUÍN PÉREZ AYESTARÁN,
AMBASSADOR, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA TO THE UNITED NATIONS,
DURING THE DEBATE ON AGENDA ITEM 125, ENTITLED “GLOBAL
HEALTH AND FOREIGN POLICY”, WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE
PLENARY OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

New York, 29 November 2023

Mr. President,

1. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the honor to take the floor on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

2. Sustainable Development Goal 3, Health and Well-being, calls upon us to ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing at all ages as an essential action for sustainable development. In this context, we cannot overemphasize that the topic that brings us together today addresses one of the most relevant and far-reaching issues that the international community and humanity as a whole have faced in recent times: global health as a priority, including in foreign policy. Global health is a fundamental aspect of the well-being of individuals and societies. In that regard, there is need for cooperation, collaboration and an inclusive approach that goes beyond borders, in order to address health challenges on a global scale.
3. The COVID-19 pandemic, as a matter of fact, has highlighted the need for increased international cooperation and solidarity, as well as the need to further strengthen multilateralism, understanding that this is the only way to overcome common challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.
4. In this context, tuberculosis is one of the communicable diseases that has historically caused the greatest devastation to humanity with an immense sequel of suffering but, at the same time, it is one of the diseases that has been most defeated, attacked and diminished as a result of collective efforts and scientific advances. It is imperative to accompany the more than ten million six hundred thousand current patients of this scourge, as per figures from the World Health Organization (WHO), while increasing awareness and global coordination in public policies to achieve its definitive eradication in the coming years.



5. In that, we seize this opportunity to pay tribute to the victims and families of communicable diseases, including tuberculosis and COVID-19, as well as to the millions of men and women on the front lines during the most recent pandemic: health and scientific workers, who have offered their mystique of service and knowledge in favor of life and hope, showing great courage and resilience, amid uncertainty and pain. Such an example should further inspire and compel all other national and global health workers to increase their efforts to better coordinate the international actions and policies that will lead us to overcome this threat, together, and, ultimately, lead us also to better prevent, prepare for and respond to public health emergencies in the future.

Mr. President,

6. As we may all recall, last September, three crucial meetings on health-related issues took place within the framework of the High-Level Segment of the General Assembly: the Second High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage, the Second High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis Control, and the First High-Level Meeting on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response. At that time, world leaders had the opportunity to reaffirm their political commitment, as well as their determination to engage in dialogue and ensure cooperation on all these issues of utmost importance for the future of humanity. One message coming out of all these meetings was clear: health cannot be just a privilege for the richest, nor can it remain a business. Health is a universal right for rich and poor alike, and both States and the United Nations are obliged to ensure that it is achieved for all.
7. In addition to the recognition by the Heads of State and Government of the importance of these global health issues, unfortunately, the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures on the urgent issue of health was not reflected in any of the outcomes of such meetings, due to the intransigence of few who are responsible for the promulgation and application of such illegal measures, who turned a deaf ear to the permanent and increasing clamor of a majority of States on the subject. A regrettable situation of procedures and incapacity of our Organization that should not be repeated.
8. In that sense, our Group of Friends further seizes this opportunity to condemn the imposition, and even intensification of unilateral coercive measures, including amid the worst pandemic humanity has faced in the past 100 years, and even despite many calls for their elimination. These illegal measures constitute real mass violations of the human rights of entire populations. Such unlawful measures unfortunately continue to endanger lives of people while violating their human rights including the right to life and the right to health on a daily basis. These illegal



measures have also hindered the timely and effective access of States subjected to the so-called sanctions to medicines, medical supplies and equipment, personal protective equipment, screening tests, treatments, vaccines and other essential goods at the present juncture, which undermines national efforts in the fight against Tuberculosis, COVID-19, and other communicable and non-communicable disease, as has been recorded by independent UN experts and also acknowledged by the UN System at large.

9. Their full, immediate and unconditional repeal is urgently needed, especially mindful of the fact that the so-called humanitarian exemptions in place have proven, in practice, to be ineffective and rather non-existent. In this regard, we also recall the initiative to create “green corridors”, free from trade wars and sanctions, primarily for essential goods, food, medicines and personal protective equipment needed to fight the Tuberculosis, COVID-19 and other diseases.
10. The question of unilateral coercive measures, we cannot overemphasize, can no longer be ignored or swept under the carpet, especially in the midst of the current juncture, when we are facing a growing trend towards the continued, systematic, relentless, unprecedented and ever-increasing resort to the promulgation, implementation and even expansion of these unlawful measures, which is having a negative impact not only on targeted nations, but also on the global economy as a whole, as well as on supply chains, food and energetic security, among other fields. Thus, at present time, unilateral coercive measures deliberately exacerbate the current global multifaceted crisis that currently confronts humanity.

Mr. President,

11. During the debate for this agenda item, which addresses the very essential topic of “health”, we cannot fail to refer to the ongoing catastrophic humanitarian situation in Palestine, including the collapse of health systems in the Gaza Strip, which is the result of systematic and widespread attacks against the Palestinian people. The world is witnessing in anguish and anger deliberate and indiscriminate attacks against the Palestinian people, including in Gaza, which has claimed lives of thousands of people, including women, children and the elderly, while threatening the health and wellbeing of those who have survived such attacks thus far.
12. As mentioned by the World Health Organization (WHO) a few days ago, regrettably, “more than 2,000 patients with cancer, 1,000 with kidney disease, 50,000 with cardiovascular disease and 60,000 with diabetes, are all at risk, as their treatment is interrupted; up to 200 women giving birth every day in the worst

imaginable conditions; an estimated 20,000 people and counting in need of specialized mental health services”.

13. We could not address the agenda item on “global health and foreign policy” and be indifferent as to such daunting and horrific situation. That being said, we once again highlight the importance of ensuring that humanitarian assistance, including crucial life-saving supplies, such as enough fuel, *inter alia*, for conducting basic humanitarian operations, as well as food, medicines and clean water, enters the Gaza Strip in an unimpeded manner and at scale, and that it can be swiftly distributed to all those in desperate need.

Mr. President,

14. Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations calls upon us to “achieve international cooperation in solving international problems” of different natures, without distinction of any kind. In the context of the fight against Tuberculosis, the COVID-19, among other diseases, as well as the guarantee of Universal Health Coverage and the pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, the imposition of economic, commercial and financial blockades represent a direct violation of the Charter, both in its letter and spirit, as well as of the very founding pillars of our Organization: peace and security, human rights, and sustainable development.
15. To conclude, we reaffirm our call to renewing the original spirit of the United Nations and its founding Charter, together with an active awareness of the lessons learned so far from the pandemic, and the urgency of assessing the scope and need to reform crucial aspects of the current model of relations between science, public policy and social justice, with a view to more equitable and immediate responses to the significant challenges that lie ahead for humanity and which requires a coordinated and effective response through the United Nations System, together with its Specialized Agencies, Programmes and Funds.

I thank you, Mr. President.