

# **Statement of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations during the Debate of the General Assembly on Agenda Item 129, entitled “Global Health and Foreign Policy”**

*New York, 09 December 2021*

**Mr. President,**

1. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is honored to take the floor on behalf of the delegations of Algeria, Angola, Belarus, Bolivia, Cambodia, China, Cuba, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Iran, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Nicaragua, the State of Palestine, Russia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Syria, Zimbabwe, and its very own, all of which are members of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the United Nations.

**Mr. President,**

2. The topic that brings us together today addresses one of the most relevant and far-reaching issues that the international community and humanity have faced in recent times. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to increase international cooperation and solidarity; the need to strengthen multilateralism, in the understanding that this is the only way to overcome common challenges in an increasingly interconnected world.
3. The public health crisis triggered by the coronavirus disease has dramatically shaken global economy and politics; it has widened the gap between North and South, and it has weakened the health systems and response capacities of both developed and developing nations, affecting especially those most vulnerable. The more than five million deaths to date must call us to reflect and redouble our efforts without further delay, in an effective and coordinated manner, to address a threat that knows no borders and that does not distinguish between rich and poor.
4. In this vein, the Group of Friends seizes this opportunity to pay tribute to the victims of the pandemic and their families, as well as to the millions of men and women on the front lines: health and scientific workers, who have offered their mystique of service and knowledge in favour of life and hope, showing great courage and resilience, amid uncertainty and pain. This example should further inspire and compel all other national and global actors to increase their efforts to 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 future pandemics.

**Mr. President,**

5. These times of emergency and uncertainty that the world is currently experiencing call for an effective and coordinated response, based on international cooperation and solidarity, within an effective, inclusive and reinvigorated multilateralism, rooted on scientific progress. Only in this way will we succeed in preserving our people's right to health and life, while guaranteeing human wellbeing.
6. In this order, while reaffirming the need to ensure universal, fair, equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 testing, treatment and vaccines, we call for an end to all types of vaccine nationalism. This is not only a moral duty but it is also the guarantee for achieving the immunity needed to defeat the pandemic, bearing in mind that no one will be safe until we all are. Therefore, our common destiny cannot depend on the greed or desire for profit of the interests of large pharmaceutical transnationals, nor on the geopolitical interests of certain States in the North, where more than 75% of vaccines are concentrated, while in the countries of the Global South there are still more than three billion people without at least one dose of immunization.
7. The Group of Friends further seizes this opportunity to condemn the imposition, and even intensification of unilateral coercive measures, amid the worst pandemic humanity has faced in the past 100 years, and even despite multiple calls for their elimination. These illegal measures constitute real mass violations of the human rights of entire populations. Their negative, and even dramatic, impact has resulted in hindrances for States subjected to the so-called sanctions concerning the effective and timely procurement of 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 COVID-19, as has been recorded by independent UN experts. Their full, immediate and unconditional repeal is urgently needed, especially mindful of the fact that the supposed humanitarian exemptions 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 current pandemic.

**Mr. President,**

8. 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 current pandemic, vaccine nationalism and 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.
9. It is in this context that we note the rushed response to the discovery of the Omicron variant of the COVID-19 by South African scientists. In spite of the transparency in sharing information on the discovery of the variant, and the fact that the variant was

subsequently discovered in several other countries across the world, a series of restrictions were put in place with regard to the entire Southern Africa region. While we understand the need to protect citizens from the risk of transmission of the variant, we also believe that any response should be based on science and evidence. In our view, the international community should work with countries in the Southern African region in finding solutions to the health emergency, in accordance with the Declarations and commitments made on Universal Health Coverage and the promise to 'leave no one behind'. As 'no one is safe until everyone is safe', working together would be the most effective way to defeat COVID-19.

10. Equity access to vaccines represents, without a doubt, one of the greatest challenges the world still has ahead of it. Our Group of Friends, however, has amongst its membership, despite the difficulties imposed, four (04) important developers and producers of vaccines and vaccine candidates (China, Cuba, Iran, and Russia), who are a source of pride for the world and who are committed to ensuring the survival of the human species in safe and peaceful environments, with development and full enjoyment of rights. Their vaccines have been and continue to be available to the entire international community – without exceptions, without hoarding or mercantilist speculation –, within the framework of a policy of solidarity and cooperation that has included donations and that, most importantly, should serve as an example for modern-day international relations.
11. To conclude, the Group of Friends reaffirms its call to renew 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 in which a coordinated and effective response must have the United Nations and its Specialized Agencies at its centre.

I thank you, Mr. President.