PLEASE NOTE: DEADLINE FOR SIGNING IS MAY 21, 2020. IN ORDER TO RESPECT THE MEDIA EMBARGO, PLEASE DO NOT SHARE THE TEXT OF THE LETTER WITH ANYONE EXCEPT OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS OR HEALTH-BASED ORGANISATIONS AHEAD OF MAY 26, 2020.
PLEASE DO NOT POST THIS LINK OR THE LETTER TEXT ON SOCIAL MEDIA UNTIL MAY 26TH, 2020. WE WILL SHARE A SOCIAL MEDIA PACK IN ADVANCE OF MAY 26TH 2020.

May 26, 2020

In support of a #HealthyRecovery

Dear[PS1] President Alberto Fernández, Prime Minister Scott Morrison, President Jair Bolsonaro, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, President Xi Jinping, President Emmanuel Macron, Chancellor Angela Merkel, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Joko Widodo, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, President Vladimir Putin, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, President Cyril Ramaphosa, President Jae-in Moon, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister Boris Johnson, President Donald Trump, President Charles Michel and President Ursula von der Leyen,

(cc: G20 chief scientific / medical / health advisors)

Health professionals stand united in support of a pragmatic, science-based approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic. In that same spirit, we also stand united in support of a #HealthyRecovery from this crisis.

We have witnessed first hand how fragile communities can be when their health, food security and freedom to work are interrupted by a common threat. The layers of this ongoing tragedy are many, and magnified by inequality and underinvestment in public health systems. We have witnessed death, disease and mental distress at levels not seen for decades.

These effects could have been partially mitigated, or possibly even prevented by adequate investments in pandemic preparedness, public health and environmental stewardship. We must learn from these mistakes and come back stronger, healthier and more resilient.

Before COVID-19, air pollution - primarily from traffic, inefficient residential energy use for cooking and heating, coal-fired power plants, the burning of solid waste, and agriculture practices - was already weakening our bodies. It increases the risk of developing, and the severity of: pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, lung cancer, heart disease and strokes, leading to seven million premature deaths each year. Air pollution also causes adverse pregnancy outcomes like low birth weight and asthma, putting further strain on our health care systems.

A truly healthy recovery will not allow pollution to continue to cloud the air we breathe and the water we drink. It will not permit unabated climate change and deforestation, potentially unleashing new health threats upon vulnerable populations.

In a healthy economy and civil society the most vulnerable among us are looked after. Workers have access to well-paying jobs that do not exacerbate pollution or nature degradation; cities prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and public transport, and our rivers and skies are protected and clean. Nature is thriving and our bodies are more resilient to infectious diseases, and nobody is pushed into poverty because of healthcare costs.

To achieve that healthy economy, we must use smarter incentives and disincentives in the service of a healthier, more resilient society. If governments were to make major reforms to current fossil fuel subsidies, shifting the majority towards the production of clean renewable energy, our air would be cleaner and climate emissions massively reduced, powering an economic recovery that would spur global GDP gains of almost 100 trillion US dollars between now and 2050.

As you direct your attention to the post-COVID response, we ask that your acting chief medical officer and chief scientific advisor are directly involved in the production of all economic stimulus packages, report on the short- and long-term public health repercussions that these may have, and give their stamp of approval.

The enormous investments your governments will make over the coming months in key sectors like health care, transport, energy and agriculture must have health protection and promotion embedded at their core.

What the world needs now is a #HealthyRecovery. Your stimulus plans must be a prescription for just that.

Yours sincerely,