Opinion Coronavirus

Five world leaders: No time for geopolitical turf battles

We need a global alliance to fight the pandemic

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Our nations, societies and economies are slowing down, almost grinding to a halt in the face of a global, external threat that transcends borders, ethnicities, and creeds. Public life has come to a virtual standstill. But these unprecedented measures of social distancing will be hard to sustain over a long period of time.
Nations are turning inward as they try to cope with the coronavirus pandemic, closing borders and imposing drastic executive measures in a retreat that risks leaving every country fending for itself. However, we can contain and counter Covid-19 more effectively by knocking down the barriers that hinder knowledge exchange and co-operation.

Crises like these tend to bring out both the best and the worst in people. It is our responsibility as leaders to encourage the former and contain the latter. Our countries are at varying stages of the crisis but we all see and admire the strong spirit of solidarity and the many people who are passionately trying to save lives or keep indispensable services up and running. They give us hope and offer inspiration that our societies may not only weather this crisis but also grow stronger and more connected.

Similarly, the most convincing way to address the global dimension of this crisis is through enhanced co-operation and solidarity. There is a central lesson to be learnt from human experience: nearly all plagues that took their toll on humankind — tuberculosis, smallpox, Ebola, Aids — have been defeated by modern medicine providing therapies and vaccines. Shared knowledge and accelerated research driven by a global network of scientists will also provide the ultimate answer to our current predicament.

This is a global crisis. Delay in action means death. We all face the same enemy and we stand to gain by bringing the full force of humanity together to fight it. There cannot be victory over the virus in one, or some, countries alone. We all have something to contribute regardless of the size of our economies or populations. A global solution is in everybody’s self-interest.
We welcome the commitment of the G20 leaders to do whatever it takes to address the crisis. We fully support the UN Secretary General’s global humanitarian appeal. But no single global entity covers the medical, economic, and political elements required to produce a vaccine for all who need it. It is our firm conviction that we must assemble a truly global alliance to mobilise human ingenuity and solidarity.

Building on the work of the World Health Organization, we call upon the World Bank Group, the IMF, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the international vaccine alliances, philanthropic foundations, scientists and private-sector pharmaceutical companies to join forces.

This new global alliance should commit to four key objectives. First, we must accelerate research and development of treatments and vaccines through open and transparent science and boosted funding. Second, we should assure rapid production, procurement and fair and equitable distribution of testing kits and critical medical equipment for all. Third, let’s rapidly scale-up production and assure the fair and equitable distribution of future therapies and vaccines to all corners of the world, including vulnerable populations such as refugees. Fourth, we must articulate the immense benefits of a co-ordinated, co-operative global response to the crisis, focusing on the provision of an eventual treatment and a vaccine as an exemplary “global public good”.

We recognise that such a multi-stakeholder alliance will not be easy to construct or manage. But we believe that it is worth the effort. It would tap into the huge reservoir of people’s hopes and better instincts. This is not the time for geopolitical turf battles.
We realise that our societies will not be the same after the crisis and the world we live in will also be different. But we defy all those who pretend to know already today that it will be a poorer, colder world with people and nations keeping their distance from each other. Our decisions over the course of the coming weeks and months will determine what the world will look like tomorrow.

Internationalising the development, manufacture and distribution of treatments and vaccines will not only deliver the antidote to the virus itself, but also to the deepening of political faultlines that has taken place since its outbreak. This pandemic will not spare any country, no matter how advanced its economy, capabilities, or technology. Before this virus, we are all equal and must work together to beat it. We are confident that if we pool our knowledge and our efforts we can and will be saved by human ingenuity. Let’s accomplish this in a spirit of solidarity, caring for everyone, be they poor or rich, old or young, woman or man. It will save lives. It will bring out the best in all of us. And it will make tomorrow’s world a better place.