



PLURINATIONAL STATE OF BOLIVIA

GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FORUM POLITICAL LEVEL CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE ECOSOC (HLFM)

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE RUBEN DARIO CUELLAR SUAREZ

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Madam President of the ECOSOC and distinguished representatives of Member States.

First of all, Bolivia wishes to express its sincere appreciation to the work of the delegations in these two weeks in which we have developed, in an innovative, virtual way, the High Level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals.

It was certainly correct to focus this year's HLPF on accelerating our plan of action in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2015, we confidently charted the path that guides us to achieve the 17 goals and 169 targets of sustainable development until 2030; however, this year, we have bumped into a huge and deadly obstacle which presents humanity with a new reality and displays our vulnerabilities like never before, bringing with it a crucial challenge regarding the priorities of our agenda, imposing health and life as the first points on it.

But it should be recognized that, before the emergency arose due to this calamity, we were already aware of worrying data showing us it would be difficult to achieve several of the objectives and goals for 2030; at least we would not succeed if the strategies and methods to meet some of these global challenges were not reexamined.

We share the certainty that the economic crisis in which the whole world is debating and which will very cruelly affect the least developed and middle-income countries, will result in millions of people thrown back under the thresholds of absolute poverty, in serious and real risk of starvation and disease. As is usually the case with systemic shocks, this crisis will hit the poorest and most vulnerable sectors the hardest.

Furthermore, this deadly obstacle has turned our region, Latin America, into the new epicenter of the global pandemic, the effects of which lead to increasing inequalities, affecting disproportionately vulnerable sectors such as indigenous people, women, the elderly and young people. This discouraging panorama is even gloomier in the case of Bolivia, as it is subject to specific pre-existing needs due to its condition as a country without access to the coast and to the delicate socio-political context that has coincided with the health emergency.

Madam President and distinguished colleagues,

The initiatives that we must inescapably discuss should focus not only on the immediate aid that the most vulnerable Member States urgently require, but also those aimed at economic recovery, which allow us to raise our battered economies in order to generate resources necessary to allow us to attend social protection programs that mitigate the strong impacts that these most vulnerable groups and sectors are suffering, mainly by strengthening health systems on the short-run, allowing us to aim towards universal medical care.

That is why we urgently need to review the procedures and methods to achieve the SDGs and cooperate decisively with the least developed countries so that we can mitigate the perverse effects that the pandemic has left on our productive apparatuses and the economy in general. We must adopt mechanisms that allow us to cooperate more effectively in the face of the financial challenges that developing countries will face in managing their economies and their external debt, both bilateral and multilateral.

The measures that this pandemic has forced us to take, such as replacing physical meetings with virtual experiences such as this one, show us that it is possible to coordinate collective solutions from a distance, involving a greater number of actors from an increasingly participatory civil society. This is the only way we will find mechanisms that allow us to share economic benefits with those who need them most and assertively address the financial challenges of developing countries, among which mine is inserted. It is within this framework that Bolivia wishes to adhere to what has been expressed by the Group of Landlocked Developing Countries - LDCs.

Madam President, distinguished delegates,

In these circumstances, I wish to share with you the measures that the government led by Constitutional President Jeanine Áñez Chávez has taken to face the pandemic and protect the Bolivian population.

It is sad to share with you that, unfortunately, during the last 14 years, the previous government administration did not make any significant investment in the area of health in general, such as the construction of new hospital infrastructure, equipment or the renovation of obsolete equipment.

According to the parameters of the World Health Organization itself, in Bolivia there should be a third level hospital for every 75,000 inhabitants, which would entail the operation of at least 149 highly-specialized medical centers, however, when the emergency began back in March of this year, in the whole country there were barely: 34 high-level public hospitals; three laboratories with the capacity to carry out testing that detected those infected by COVID-19; and no more than 90 intensive care units. On average, during the last 14 years, only 352 new hospital beds were incorporated and only 900 new health items were provided for the hiring of new officials.

This chronic deficit that the sector carried, which resulted in a lack of personnel, training, equipment and fair wages, was the cause of multiple warnings and calls for attention from specialized international organizations, which, however, did not achieve the commitment of the previous administration, in spite of the economic boom we were experiencing, to implement better health plans in Bolivia and having a better infrastructure, since health was never a priority objective, as confirmed by the reported public investment figures from the previous period.

In the past three months, 14 fully equipped clinical laboratories were enabled to perform COVID-19 tests; 375 new intensive care units and 955 additional hospital beds; while 2,239 new items have been implemented that make it possible to hire the same number of health professionals.

Likewise, the free provision of medicines to the most vulnerable population was established, through direct shipments, to most of the 339 municipalities in the country.

Madam President,

The measures to contain and prevent the pandemic that we have adopted are framed within the respect and observance of the right to life, respect for human rights and access to health and medical care for all and all Bolivians.

Therefore, from the first moment of this crisis, we took special care to those who most need it, such as our indigenous peoples. For this reason, the Mitigation Plan for the effects of Covid 19 on indigenous and indigenous peoples was designed and executed. This plan consists of supporting with food, medicine and equipment more than 62 thousand families located in the nine departments of the country.

In the same way, last June, the government enacted the Law that reallocates a part of the resources of the Direct Income for Hydrocarbons for Autonomous Territorial Entities and public universities, with the objective of safeguarding the health of Bolivians and that those resources are used to fight coronavirus, strengthen food security and productive activities so that the economic engine of our country remains active.

By early July, we have managed to cover the needs of more than 10 million Bolivian women and men; the first financial relief called the Family Basket, was delivered to more than a million people with urgent needs; the Family Bond, reached a total of two million eight hundred thousand low-income people; more than three and a half million people have received a universal financial bonus; more than two million seven hundred thousand senior citizens have received the Dignity Bond.

The Bolivian economy has not been immune to the strong blows of the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore, from the first days of June, as we faced the most pressing needs in health and food, we also dedicated a good part of government efforts to revive the economy and create jobs. These efforts were concretized in the National Program for Reactivation and Employment, based on 5 pillars: i) working capital for producers; ii) creation of intensive employment in public works; iii) determined promotion of business entrepreneurship; iv) substantial increase in state purchases of Bolivian products and, v) saving on unnecessary State expenses.

These measures were accompanied by significant fiscal efforts that meant tax reductions, deferred payments to the financial system, a reduction of up to 30% in electricity and drinking water rates, the continuity of telecommunications services without the application of cuts by unpaid services, thus guaranteeing access to the internet and information technologies to the entire population.

Madam President and distinguished heads of delegation.

Bolivia, like the vast majority of countries in the world, faces the great challenges of post-pandemic economic recovery. We believe that recovering, preserving and increasing social well-being must be an immediate objective, only in this way will we advance towards real social inclusion, thus consolidating social cohesion.

We are convinced that the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda give us a glimpse of a horizon set in people's well-being, through the development of social and economic policies that contribute to having a better world. However, in the face of this situation, we are not unaware of the challenges that some setbacks represent, which makes this a historic moment to join and redouble efforts, adapting the responses to local conditions, and these should be driven and strengthened by international cooperation.

As one of the immediate measures, we must ensure that the vaccine is made for all humanity and its availability does not generate a monopoly or is governed solely by market logic.

Finally, Bolivia renews its commitment to the 2030 Agenda, putting into practice the necessary efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and in the practice of multilateralism we commit ourselves to hard work, now that we have been elected as members of ECOSOC, the important instance that organizes the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development that we concluded successfully today.

Thank you very much.