

While the World is in Turmoil, the People's Health Movement calls for Hope, Optimism, Resistance, Solidarity and Peace

No time for despair

The Steering Council of the People's Health Movement (PHM) met on February 26-28, 2025, that took place in turbulent times, it would be easy to succumb to despair.

Decades of neoliberal capitalism and the current political climate globally have led to interrelated crises: rampant inequalities (in power, wealth, and resources), environmental collapse (climate crisis, biodiversity loss, species extinctions, and environmental degradation); wars, occupation and conflicts and forced displacement (with increasing numbers of people in the Global South seeking refuge from these crises, and defense contractors accumulate wealth from creating death) and rising conservatism and a backlash against hard-earned women's rights. This is further characterized by the commercialization and privatization of health systems, which has contributed to preventing the achievement of the PHM's Health for All goal.

We must therefore strengthen our efforts in the struggle for a more equitable, ecologically sustainable, decolonial and peaceful world, in which a healthy life for all is a reality. A world that respects diversity and celebrates all life in harmony with nature; a world that enables and recognises abilities to enrich each other; a world in which people's voices and community centred approaches guide the decisions that shape our lives. This can be achieved through collective action, advocacy for social justice and climate justice, and challenging oppressive systems that perpetuate inequality. By coming together as a global community, we can work towards creating a better future for all beings on this planet. By prioritizing the "*Buen Vivir*" (well-being) of marginalized/vulnerable communities and addressing the root causes of systemic injustices, we can pave the way for a more equitable and inclusive world where every individual has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to a brighter and transformative future for generations to come.

New challenges building on old imperial pattern of behaviour

These challenges are unfolding amidst a geopolitical realignment. Multilateralism, which characterized much of the second half of the 20th century, has coexisted with—and at times been instrumentalized by—a unipolar world dominated by the United States. Since the financial crisis of the early 21st century, however, the U.S. has struggled to maintain its unilateral dominance and confronts a multipolar world in which China's global influence challenges its own. The BRICS+ group of developing countries, collectively, comprises almost 35 percent of the global economic product and strives to reform multilateral institutions and to consolidate a multipolar world. While the U.S. continues to rely on the strength of the dollar as a global reserve currency to sustain its economic power, the 'American century' is over, and the country increasingly relies on its unmatched military force to assert influence.

The polycrisis we are experiencing includes a looming second Cold War and even the threat of a world war, with a focus in East Asia. It is for this reason that the United States is reorganizing the deployment of its military forces, urging Europe, which showed significant willingness, to increase its military spending (with a focus on Russia), and forcing other countries to do the same. The impact of this increase in military spending will further centralized the wealth in countries that host the major defence contractors, and with the impact on public debt, will likely be a cut of the public budget and the reduction of the remaining welfare state benefits, including health. The environment is also going to suffer as commitments to environmental programs and climate change mitigation are abandoned and destructive but profitable practices are promoted.

Growing geopolitical tensions have fueled political polarization, while social degradation and economic insecurity have allowed far-right authoritarian leaders to rise to power in multiple countries. Misogyny, racism, white supremacy, the 'othering' of migrants, and paternalistic policies have been emboldened globally, allowing right-wing parties to flourish.

Rise of oligarchy capitalism

Although for decades other dominant political forces in the United States and Europe have been eroding human rights and fueling wars, the second Trump presidency in the United States has culminated the political shift to the recalcitrant right, signaling the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, the breakdown of the welfare state, the elimination of overseas aid, and the threat of sweeping cuts to welfare programs. Internationally, it marks the end of multilateralism, replaced by economic protectionism, political isolationism, and old-style American imperialist expansionism. More than ever, Trump's presidency reveals that these policies are orchestrated by and for the ultra-rich, as a small oligarchy of billionaires, some of them linked to global technological networks, now wields direct control over the U.S. state. Having Trump elected by nearly 50% of the US voters reflects significant mistrust of American voters in the traditional political establishments and more importantly, tendency towards popular aggression or confrontational rhetoric.

Challenges for global health initiatives

Trump's second administration (representing a tendency in the US) continues reshaping global health, impacting institutions, financing, and populations in vulnerable circumstances. The ability of the World Health Organization (WHO) to coordinate pandemic responses, disease surveillance, and health equity initiatives has already been undermined for years. The recent U.S. withdrawal from WHO further encourages fragmentation (e.g., favouring bilateral partnerships over multilateralism), increases the pressure to accept tied philanthropy and stakeholders influence, and emboldens other nations to bypass international norms, eroding trust in collective action during current affairs and crises. Reduced contributions to global health initiatives create funding gaps that disproportionately affect low-income countries. Yet, the withdrawal of the US from WHO might offer opportunity for countries from the Global South to take further responsibility to support and defend multilateralism and offer a chance for more democratic governance of WHO without the hegemony of the US.

Health crises in conflict zones like Palestine, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are worsening. The U.S.'s unwavering support for settler-colonialism in West Asia further marginalizes Palestinian health needs in Gaza, where hospitals face bombardment and severe shortages and US and European threat of ethnic cleansing of Gaza represents an existential threat to the Palestinian people. In Sudan and the DRC, cuts to humanitarian aid threaten to collapse health systems, exacerbating malnutrition and infectious diseases. Sanctions and a lack of diplomatic engagement may prolong violence, leaving millions without access to medical care.

Attack on immigrants

Mass displacements and deportations under stricter immigration policies will strain health infrastructure in transit and host countries. Expanded deportation programs risk overcrowding refugee camps, increasing disease outbreaks and mental health crises. Additionally, economic crises and violence in Latin America and

the Middle East will exacerbate the root causes of displacement, such as poverty and violence, perpetuating cycles of instability.

Attack on sexual and reproductive health and rights and marginalized population groups

Intensified attacks on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have devastating consequences worldwide. The reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule, which bars U.S. foreign assistance to organizations that provide, support, or even discuss abortion services, severely limits access to essential healthcare. This policy disrupts reproductive health services, including contraception, maternal care, and abortion care, leading to increased maternal mortality, higher rates of unplanned pregnancies, and a rise in unsafe abortions—disproportionately affecting communities in the Global South and those with fragile healthcare systems.

These attacks on SRHR coincide with drastic cuts to foreign aid by the U.S. and other donor nations, worsening humanitarian crises with catastrophic long-term consequences. Feminists and health activists have long warned of the dangers of this reactionary agenda. These policies are not just about healthcare; they are part of a broader effort to control women, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other marginalized populations. Furthermore the recent attempts to de-recognise more than two genders and un-winds support for LGBTQ+ policies will have deep repercussions on the trans- and non-binary communities.

The conditionality of aid reflects a broader system of control, reinforcing economic and political subjugation under the guise of humanitarian support. It highlights the neo-imperialism of the aid system itself, where the Global South remains at the mercy of funding decisions made in the Global North.

The need for optimism, hope, resistance, solidarity and peace

In the face of these developments, it would be easy to lose hope—but chaos also brings opportunities. The battle lines are now more clearly drawn, making it easier to identify allies and adversaries. For example, even if U.S. withdrawal could lead to the WHO collapse, it still could survive and strive but, most importantly, the removal of the US yoke and corporate pressures could be an opportunity for progressive forces to strengthen multilateralism and to move WHO global governance towards more democratic, participatory and inclusive positions.

Despite the deaths of more than 50,000 people during the genocidal war in Palestine, US dominance—along with a small group of allies—has been increasingly eroded on the world stage, as illustrated, for example, by the voting pattern in the United Nations General Assembly, as UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese has noted, referring to the growing isolation of the United States and its partners in the voting results.

Likewise, at the local level, people's organizations, trade unions, and communities are resisting and building alternatives rooted in solidarity and social justice.

That is our source of hope as we committed ourselves during the 5th People's Health Assembly (PHA) last year in Mar del Plata to “work for the creation of a broad front of social movements for the construction of a new economic, political and social order,” and to “seek agreements with political parties and states that promote it.”

Our comrades in Palestine may lead the way. They have endured a genocidal war for nearly a year and a half, yet they do not back down. Resistance has become a way of life. They do not have the luxury of

pessimism. PHM has successfully raised 90 thousand Euros in around four months in solidarity with Al Awda field hospital in Gaza, and Viva Salud has put into practice a successful strategy of psychological first aid for the Awda youth group in Deir Al-Balah. In the MENA region PHM not only addresses the health care services component but also other health conditions of refugees and migrants all faced by countries in constant crisis.

In the struggles against the neo-liberal and biomedical public health policies, important actions are being deployed and expanded. Health activists have been fighting to increase public budgets, strengthen public pharmaceuticals, protect health workers employment and working conditions, and protect, respect and recognize the traditional knowledge, practices and medicines of indigenous peoples worldwide. In India, for instance, JSA has developed significant grassroots mobilizations, advocacy, legal and electoral actions, accompanied by health surveys, budget analyses and public policy interventions. Argentinian health workers have taken to the streets en masse to confront the defunding and privatization of health care services and the authoritarianism and misogyny of Javier Milei's government.

Our struggle for health continues to expand in themes such as gender justice, where we have been expanding and collaborating with other women's groups and human rights defenders to highlight the ongoing violence against women and children, lack of access to SRH services, and humanitarian crises in Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon, Yemen, etc. PHM members in Latin America and Europe are addressing the challenges of far-right political parties regarding abortion and other gender rights. Women health workers are organising in many countries such as Philippines, Bangladesh and India for their basic rights.

We have been strengthening our alliance with Via Campesina and more than 50 movements from more than 80 countries through the process of organizing the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum on food sovereignty. PHM also developed various activities around the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference of the Parties (COP16). To this end, it collaborated with the World Social Forum of Transformative Economies, ENLAZADOS (the regional alliance of MAELA, the Latin American Agroecological Movement), and the Movement of Social and Solidarity Economies. These are just some examples of what PHM has been doing and will continue to do on a much larger scale.

That is precisely why Amit Sengupta, one of our comrades and pioneers who left us too soon, urged us to *"Consider optimism as a purposeful act of political resistance."*

On this milestone, let us honor struggles past and present by refusing despair. Another world is not just possible—it is being forged, brick by brick, in the clinics of Gaza, the protests of the Global South, and the unyielding resolve of those who dare to imagine that another fairer, sustainable, peaceful and healthy world is possible.

We therefore resolve to redouble our efforts to respond to our Mar del Plata Call to Action (<https://phmovement.org/pha5-mar-del-plata-2024-call-to-action>), which aims to mobilize PHM activists and other social movements.

More concretely, we encourage social movements and people around the world to prioritize the following strategic action points:



- Denounce U.S. bullying; explain the structures of U.S. imperialism; isolate Trump and his MAGA supporters.
- Redouble demands for technology transfers in relation to global warming mitigation and adaptation and campaign for financial support for low-and middle-income countries.
- Promote the participation in the Amazonian Indigenous People's COP to take place in November 2025 in Belem del Pará (Brazil) and forge an alliance with the indigenous people to protect and care for the environment and the health of people and mother earth.
- Fight the privatization of knowledge through intellectual property (IP) rights; and drive the campaign for technology transfer and distributed public sector production of medical goods.
- Engage the efforts of PHM regional coordination and country circles to promote the Public Pharma Campaign, especially in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Asia, Southern and Eastern Africa, and India.
- Redouble fiscal allocations for health care in the Global South, linked to the withdrawal of US 'development assistance'; focus on public sector health care systems oriented around PHC; set guard rails around private health insurance and privately provided health care.
- Consolidate and deepen the "South-South Dialogue on Sustainability: Traditional Medicine in the Global South" for the protection of indigenous knowledge systems, their autonomous and intercultural health care, and the research, production and distribution of traditional medicines in public and community hands.
- Challenge power structures and resist the anti- gender discourses and policies to achieve a gender just and equitable world to achieve transformative change.
- Denounce political and religious conservatism, misogyny, and authoritarianism.
- Support sexual and reproductive health rights including access to abortion.
- Support participation, mobilization and social movements alliance building around the 3rd Nyéléni Global Forum on food sovereignty to take place on September 2025 in Sri Lanka.
- Promote ideas and policies on economic development which counter the default norms of capitalist development (and environmental degradation, economic inequality, cultural alienation).
- Champion peace-led-by-justice by resisting the arms race, and advocate a redirection of funds from military spending and public debt repayment toward expanding and strengthening social protection.
- Promote in Europe a broad alliance with the workers trade unions and a mobilization process against the war and the cut in public budgets on health care, social protection and other conditions for health.
- Continue and Strengthen the Stop the Wars Campaign with focus on Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) while recognizing and supporting all forms of resistance against occupation and armed violence. We also support a politically negotiated solution to the war in Ukraine.

In promoting convergence with other social movements and health networks we encourage all activists, country and regional circles, global programs, Steering Council and Advisory Council members as well as all the PHM affiliated networks to engage with and move forward the following conversations:

- Build global solidarity with aligned social and health, feminist movements to resist fascism, classism, racism, casteism, sexism, patriarchy, homophobia and transphobia , and other forms of oppression.



- Let us stand united against all forms of discrimination and work towards a more inclusive, just and equitable world for all. Together, we can challenge systems of power and advocate for the rights and dignity of all individuals.
- Build pressure for more equitable and healthy policies, converging with other progressive social and political movements and working with aligned governments; defending WHO and transforming it to make it work better.
- Promote action on global warming, including meaningful support for adaptation in the global South; building support for ecosocialism.
- Prioritise *buen vivir* (living well) over materialism, consumerism, individualism by rebonding with Mother Earth.
- Promote anti-imperialist economic policies, including: a new New International Economic Order, de-dollarisation, tax reform, regulation of Transnational Corporations, and a new approach to international debt to restore national economic sovereignty;
- Defend real democracy; including democratic control over key economic controls.
- Contribute to building a multipolar world including regional cooperation and equitable multilateralism.