



## **Statement by the Steering Council (SC) of People's Health Movement (PHM)**

The Steering Council (SC) of the People's Health Movement (PHM) had its annual meeting from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 2022 in the midst of a critical health emergency. The unprecedented nature of the COVID 19 pandemic and its spread like a wildfire, produced a shock for the entirety of humanity with its unprecedented health, social and economic implications, especially to the marginalised groups, socio-economically disadvantaged classes, and poorer regions of the world.

The mass havoc and unprecedented health disaster is a direct consequence of the dismantling of public health services within nations as well as the distorted decision-making processes of global institutions. WHO, which was already facing a crisis of legitimacy and undermined by chronic underfunding due to austerity policies, was criticised for its limitations in responding to the pandemic's health impacts. Covid 19 also exposed health-damaging transformations, including environmental degradation, in a world order tied to a neoliberal economic ideology that values profit over public health and promotes commercialization of public health services. Many countries failed to adequately respond to pandemic-related needs for health care. The dominant corporate pharmaceutical industry (Big Pharma), profiting from a massive infusion of public funding supporting research for vaccine discovery and production, clearly revealed that their interests lie more in safeguarding their patent "rights" than in saving lives. Such structural flaws in public health institutions and policies at regional and global levels –together with the ongoing menace of commercialized health care– aggravated difficult national situations while undermining efforts to alleviate the health- and socially-harmful global impacts of Covid-19.

As already well documented, the combination of these critical assaults on public health and global policy paralysis have generated highly skewed outcomes and impact by social class, deepening racial and social inequity, raising mortality levels in low-income countries and low-income populations everywhere, and jeopardizing the lives and livelihoods of Indigenous peoples and poorer segments from social and economic participation.

As just one example, global gender disparity during the pandemic increased with a widening gender gap in employment and uncompensated labor. From March 2020 to September 2021, 26.0% of women reported job loss compared to 20.4% of men, globally. Women/gender minorities were more vulnerable to pandemic-related economic effects of lockdowns and recession. Gender based inequity has been detrimental for the economically poorer women, in particular women working in unorganized sectors who face abject poverty, hunger, and poor health.



On another front, since the pandemic began, a new billionaire has been created every 26 hours and the wealth/fortunes of existing super rich class have multiplied substantially while 120 million people have been pushed to extreme poverty.

Moreover, the association of new and emerging viruses (such as SARS-CoV-2) with intensified agribusiness is well known by people in affected regions and increasingly evidenced by scientific knowledge, but the role of industrial agriculture in creating such zoonotic exposures is largely overlooked by national and global policies.

Our present era of worsening conflicts, political instability, armed violence, poverty, income inequality, social oppression, relentless extractivism, and climate crises is associated with the widespread loss of livelihoods leading to mass migration and the forced displacement of people across the world.

Indeed, these nefarious trends reverberated during the pandemic. For instance, in 2020 the global military expenditure reached \$1,917 billion: the United States continued to lead global military spending amounting to 38% of the total, followed by China (14%), Russia (3.4%), and Saudi Arabia (3.2%). Arms sales by the top 20 military contractors, who profit most from militarism and war, reached US\$235.3 billion in 2020. Cynically, heinously, and tragically, military spending is largely financed by public resources that ultimately fund private corporations.

In response to these many interrelated crises, PHM re-commits itself to strengthening the people's global health movement through collaborative work and promoting an inclusive and democratic vision of health and health care policies. We will continue to work towards an international mobilization of people to defend health as a fundamental human right, address the demands of social justice in the context of the realisation of universal and quality public healthcare, denounce the deterioration and privatization of health systems, generate awareness towards nutritional food patterns and sustainable water systems, and raise voices for adequate and substantial public funding towards health human resources and infrastructure.

Throughout the pandemic, PHM has demanded that the international community, represented by the multilateral organizations, take responsibility for equitable access to preventive, promotive, and curative measures to mitigate the pandemic, including but not limited to, eliminating the unfair intellectual property privileged regime. In this regard, PHM supports immediate actions to reduce the current massive COVID-19 vaccine inequity.



During these times of pandemic, climate change, environmental degradation, and growing armed conflict, we will demand that the international community take all needed measures to prevent, stop and mitigate the consequences of armed conflicts, sanitary and ecological crises. We demand prohibiting the production and trade in arms and to channel these resources to create better conditions for ecological sustainability and people's life and work.

As a movement defending health as a social right, we urge for an international mobilization for peace, for decent and healthy food and water sustainability, for the strengthening of both public health services and health care services with substantial public funding for the needed human capacity and infrastructure, as we believe that another world is possible.