

I. STUDII, CERCETĂRI, ARTICOLE

GLOBAL HEALTH, SOLIDARITY AND MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY*

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Abstract:

Articolul este consacrat temei sănătății globale din perspectiva diplomației multilaterale, cu accent pe rolul solidarității în înlăturarea dreptului la sănătate. Sunt analizate rezoluțiile Adunării Generale a ONU privind legătura dintre sănătatea globală și politica externă, precum și rezoluțiile pertinente ale Națiunilor Unite din 2020 privind COVID-19. O atenție specială este acordată evidențierii importanței solidarității și multilateralismului în procesul cooperării internaționale pentru materializarea dreptului fundamental la sănătate la nivel global.

Cuvinte cheie: sănătate, solidaritate, diplomație, Adunarea Generală a ONU, rezoluție, COVID-19, cooperare, multilateralism, dezvoltare durabilă

Résumé:

L'article est consacré au thème de la santé mondiale sous l'angle de la diplomatie multilatérale, en mettant l'accent sur le rôle de la solidarité dans l'exercice du droit à la santé. Les résolutions de l'Assemblée générale des Nations Unies sur le lien entre la santé mondiale et la politique étrangère sont analysées, ainsi que les résolutions pertinentes des Nations Unies de 2020 sur COVID-19. Une attention particulière est accordée à la mise en évidence de l'importance de la solidarité et du multilatéralisme dans le processus de coopération internationale pour la concrétisation du droit fondamental à la santé au niveau mondial.

Mots-clés: santé, solidarité, diplomatie, Assemblée générale des Nations Unies, résolution, COVID-19, coopération, multilatéralisme, développement durable

Preliminary observations

According to Chinese wisdom, "Health is preferable to wealth". This truth could not fail to have an inspirational impact on diplomacy.

In 2007 the foreign ministers of Brazil, France, Indonesia, Norway, Senegal, South Africa and Thailand adopted a valuable initiative entitled

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“The Global Health and Foreign Policy”. This initiative was contained in a comprehensive document under the title “Oslo Ministerial Declaration-global health: a pressing foreign policy issue of our time”.¹

The first paragraph of the Declaration asserts that “We believe that health is one of the most important, yet still broadly neglected, long-term foreign policy issues of our time. [...] We believe that health as a foreign policy issue needs a stronger strategic focus on the international agenda. We have therefore agreed to make ‘impact on health’ a point of departure and a defining lens that each of our countries will use to examine key elements of foreign policy and development strategies, and to engage in a dialogue on how to deal with policy options from this perspective”.

The same document contains the clear commitment of its authors to “work to increase awareness of our common vulnerability in the face of health threats by bringing health issues more strongly into the arenas of foreign policy discussions and decisions, to strengthen our commitment to concerted action at the global level; build bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation for global health security by strengthening the case for collaboration and brokering broad agreement, accountability, and action; reinforce health as a key element in strategies for development and for fighting poverty to ensure universal access to medicines; strengthen the place of health measures in conflict and crisis management and in reconstruction efforts”.²

This diplomatic document proved to be highly instrumental in a successful worldwide lobby which led to the inscription on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) of the item “Global health and foreign policy”.³

Since 2008, as a result of fruitful negotiations, this item was permanently on the UNGA agenda and was considered on the basis of professional reports prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General. The reports, discussions and resolutions resulting from the consideration of this item revealed the existence of different areas of collaboration between health and foreign policy, helped to formulate specific recommendations,

¹ The Oslo Ministerial Declaration is available at [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(07\)60498-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(07)60498-X/fulltext) visited on 5 May 2020.

² For a detailed analysis of health diplomacy, see Ilona Kickbusch (Editor) *Global health diplomacy* (2013), Springer, New York. The research in this book is situated at the intersection of public health, international relations, law, economics, and management, advocating for a new discipline with transformative potential. The analysis provides a solid background for understanding global health issues from a diplomatic perspective. See also <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/05/07/national/politics-diplomacy/coronavirus-world-leaders-online-diplomacy/#.XrQwLKgzBIU> visited on 7 May 2020.

³ For a short history of this item at the UN see the annotated agenda of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly at <https://undocs.org/en/A/74/100> visited on 5 May 2020.

thus contributing to a better understanding of the importance of health in international policy and developmental discussions.

Until 2018 all resolutions on this item were adopted by consensus which illustrates the positive role of multilateral diplomacy in obtaining a general agreement of 193 UN member states on a highly significant global issue.⁴

We will refer in this article to the first (2008) and to the most recent 2018 and 2019 resolutions.

A vibrant appeal for action

In the first resolution adopted on 26 November 2008 the UNGA underscored the fact that global health is a long-term objective that is national, regional, and international in scope and requires sustained attention, commitment, and closer international cooperation beyond emergency.⁵

The UNGA appreciated the contribution made by civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, on issues related to foreign policy and global health, and welcomed the ongoing partnerships between a variety of stakeholders at the local, national, regional and global levels aimed at addressing the multifaceted determinants of global health and the commitments and initiatives to accelerate progress on the health-related goals.

The significance of this resolution is highly emphasized by the clear recognition in its first operative paragraph of the close relationship between foreign policy and global health and their interdependence, and in that regard also the recognition that global challenges require concerted and sustained efforts by the international community.

The UNGA urged member states to consider health issues in the formulation of foreign policy.

A much more elaborated diplomatic approach to this issue is illustrated by the resolution introduced by Brazil and adopted by UNGA on 13 December 2018 and disseminated worldwide on 10 January 2019.

Regrettably, mass-media ignored this document.

This resolution is based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and emphasizes that health is a precondition for and an outcome and indicator of all Sustainable Development Goals. It also reminds that, despite the progress made, challenges in global health still remain, with special regard to inequities and vulnerabilities within and among countries, regions and populations, and that investments in health contribute to sustainable, inclusive economic

⁴ All resolutions quoted in this article are available at <https://www.un.org/en/sections/documents/general-assembly-resolutions/index.html>

⁵ For the full text of the resolution see the document indicated in note 4 supra.

growth, social development, environmental protection, eradication of poverty and hunger, achieving gender equality and reducing inequalities.⁶

In this resolution, UNGA refers to the fact that global health is a long-term objective which is national, regional and international in scope and requires sustained high-level commitment and closer international cooperation, including far-reaching partnerships among stakeholders, and the need to safeguard the progress made and to further advance by paying due attention to the continuity and sustainability of current actions on global health.

There is no doubt and the resolution reconfirms this obvious fact by reminding that it is the primary responsibility of member states to determine and promote their own path towards achieving universal health coverage that comprises universal and equitable access to quality health services and quality, essential, affordable and effective medicines for all, while ensuring that the use of such services and medicines does not expose the users to financial hardship. At the same time, member states need to pay particular attention to those who are vulnerable or in vulnerable situations, and consider that it is critical to promote physical and mental health and well-being, especially through primary health care, health services and social protection mechanisms, including through community outreach and private sector engagement, and with the support of the international community.

A useful reference is also made to the reality that health inequities within and between countries are politically, socially, and economically unacceptable, as well as unfair and largely avoidable.

At the same time, UNGA noted that many of the underlying determinants of health and risk factors of communicable and non-communicable diseases are associated with social, economic, environmental, and behavioural conditions.

Special attention is paid in this document to the need to eradicate hunger and prevent all forms of malnutrition worldwide, including undernourishment, stunting, wasting, underweight and overweight in all age groups, in particular among children under 5 years of age, and deficiencies in micronutrients, in particular vitamin A, iodine, iron and zinc, among others.

UNGA informs the world community of nations that it is conscious that multiple forms of malnutrition can affect all countries, can occur not only within countries and communities but also within households and can affect the same person multiple times over their lifetime.

In UNGA's opinion undernutrition and overweight and obesity are commonly referred to as the double burden of malnutrition, and concern

⁶ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

was expressed about the burden of diet-related non-communicable diseases in all age groups and the rising trends of undernourishment and overweight and obesity, as well as the increase in anaemia among women and the still unacceptably high levels of stunting in children.

Special concern is expressed by UNGA about the increasing number of people facing crisis-level food insecurity or worse, up from almost 108 million in 2016 to 124 million in 2017 in countries affected by, inter alia, conflict and exacerbated by climate-related events, environmental factors, including natural disasters, and excessive food price volatility.

The same resolution does not fail to mention the essential contribution that older persons can continue to make to the functioning of societies and towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and expressed concern that many health systems are not sufficiently prepared to respond to the need for promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, palliative and specialized care.

Several preambular paragraphs of the resolution are dedicated to institutional aspects and with interesting references to the relationship between health and nutrition.

The first operative paragraph of the resolution contains a strong call addressed to member states to reinforce actions towards the improvement of nutrition, health conditions and living standards of populations around the globe as a key element of strategies for the eradication of malnutrition and poverty in all its forms and dimensions, as well as the promotion of sustainable development.

A very interesting provision of the resolution aims to encourage member states to develop health and nutrition by promoting environments, including through nutrition education in schools and other educational institutions, as appropriate, and to scale up community-based actions that support children and families, through the promotion of maternal health.

In strong diplomatic language, the UNGA calls upon member states, in partnership with other relevant stakeholders, including international and regional organizations and academia, to consider scaling up research and knowledge dissemination on the correlations between health, notably its economic and social determinants, and nutrition and food systems to generate evidence and guidance on effective nutrition programmes and policies.

A topical provision that deserves to be mentioned is about UNGA's encouragement for greater coherence and coordination among United Nations bodies, specialized agencies and entities on matters related to global health and foreign policy.

From the diplomatic point of view, it should be noted that UNGA treats the item under consideration in this article with special attention for its

continuity. Thus, UNGA looked forward to the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on universal health coverage, held in New York in September 2019, under the theme “Universal health coverage: moving together to build a healthier world”.⁷

Finally, UNGA requests the UN Secretary-General, in close collaboration with the Director-General of the WHO, as well as other relevant international organizations, to report to the General Assembly at its 74th session, in 2019, under the item entitled “Global health and foreign policy”, on improving international coordination and cooperation to address health needs and the challenges for the achievement of a healthier world through better nutrition.

We have summarized above, without entering into details, the content of the 2018 resolution dedicated to global health and foreign policy as a major issue of contemporaneity, able to attract adequate and constant diplomatic action.

The adoption of this resolution can be considered a real success of multilateral diplomacy in the general process of international cooperation in specific human fields.

However, this success can be measured only in the light of the actual implementation of recommendations addressed to the 193 UN member states. There is no special mechanism able to monitor the implementation of this resolution by various groups of states.

Nevertheless, the preparation of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on universal health coverage which took place in September 2019 had the role, politically speaking, of encouraging member states to pay adequate attention to the implementation of recommendations addressed to them by the most representative forum in world politics, which is the UN General Assembly.

It should be noted that the resolution “Scope, modalities, format and organization of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage” was adopted without a vote.⁸

The document, which was adopted in September 2019 at the end of the high-level meeting dedicated to this item, should be treated very seriously and should be fully implemented at the national and local levels by all member states.

That could be considered a remarkable success of multilateral diplomacy in the service of global health.

⁷ See the final document on universal health coverage at <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/07/FINAL-draft-UHC-Political-Declaration.pdf>

⁸ For the full text of this resolution, see the document indicated in note 4 supra.

The new context

In 2020, in the midst of a severe global health crisis to confront the entire human family in recent decades, the WHO and the United Nations (UN) are under an unprecedented political attack from many directions. Why such attacks, when there is a consensus that international organizations cannot be better than the countries composing them?⁹

Indeed, the novel coronavirus (officially named COVID-19) is in 2020 an obvious global danger, and there are strong reasons to ask to what extent the world community of nations is prepared to successfully cope with this pandemic. In a memorable sentence, Henry Kissinger summarized the situation as follows: “The reality is the world will never be the same after the coronavirus”.¹⁰ It is obvious that COVID-19 spreads like wildfire around the globe, irrespective of political boundaries, economic status or military potential.

In a report dated 6 April 2020 the UN Secretary-General summarized the situation generated at the global level by COVID-19 in the following terms:

“In early 2020, and in just 12 weeks, the emergence of a novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has evolved from an initially confined outbreak to a pandemic, affecting over 199 countries and territories as at the end of March. The speed and scale of the spread, the severity of cases and the societal and economic disruption have already been dramatic, with even more serious consequences in countries with slender resources and weak health systems. COVID-19 is hitting societies at their core. It has plunged the world economy into a recession with enormous socio-economic implications, staggering unemployment and dire deprivation. The crisis risks reversing decades of progress in the fight against poverty and exacerbating already high levels of inequality within and between countries. A global coming together and a global solution for all are urgently needed. At the geopolitical level, the crisis is seen as a cry for leadership, solidarity, transparency, trust and cooperation”.¹¹

However, the situation as described above is not a new one from the perspective of global health, as 193 UN Member States attempted several

⁹ For a recent balanced, diplomatic evaluation of the UN system, see Hamad bin Abdulaziz Al-Kawar, *It's Time to Reform the UN* at <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/united-nations-covid19-response-shows-need-for-reform-by-hamad-bin-abdulaziz-al-kawari-2020-05>. The author of the article is a Minister of State of Qatar with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Qatar National Library, and a former Qatari ambassador to the United Nations.

¹⁰ This quotation is taken from the article “The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order” by Henry A. Kissinger, *The Wall Street Journal*, April 3, 2020.

¹¹ The full text of the report is available at <https://www.undocs.org/fr/A/74/786>.

times to deal with it advance, as explained during the first part of the present article and in the next pages. Facts are crystal-clear.

On 11 December 2019, in a comprehensive resolution (11 pages, 41 operative paragraphs) adopted by consensus and circulated worldwide on 28 January 2020 under the title “Global health and foreign policy: an inclusive approach to strengthening health systems” the UN offered persuasive warnings and recommendations which deserved universal attention.¹²

That resolution was prepared, negotiated and promoted with the active participation of the WHO (194 members) and is a positive result of the efforts of multilateral diplomacy practiced under the auspices of the UN system, WHO being a specialized agency in this global family.

Today, as estimated, at the highest political level, the world faces its gravest test since the founding of the UN in 1945.

At present, when mass-media informs us every day about the dangerous proliferation of COVID-19 on all continents, it is unexplainable and inexcusable to keep that document/resolution only in the files of persons directly involved in the negotiations, consultations, drafting and adoption process of the above-mentioned diplomatic instrument.

The efficient implementation of this resolution must be on the priority list of all competent factors at the local, national, regional and global levels. The resolution specifically warns that many of the underlying determinants of health and risk factors of communicable diseases are associated with social, economic, environmental and behavioural conditions.

The coronavirus demonstrates in a persuasive manner the topicality of the strong reminder of the resolution under consideration about the real need for health systems to be strong, resilient, functional, well-governed, responsive, accountable, integrated, community-based, people-centred and capable of quality service delivery, supported by a competent health workforce, adequate health infrastructure, enabling legislative and regulatory frameworks, as well as sufficient and sustainable funding.

The ordinary readers of the resolution might be tempted to think that its recommendations belong to the area of wishful thinking. They would be right in their pessimism if this resolution is not put into effect by the decision-making bodies at the national level. The UN General Assembly acknowledged that owing to antimicrobial resistance, many achievements of the twentieth century are being gravely challenged, in particular, the reduction in illness and death from infectious diseases.

Hoping that an anti-COVID-19 vaccine will be soon available, it is vital to fully implement the UN recommendation according to which all states and

¹² The resolution is available in the document indicated in note 4 supra.

relevant organizations are expected to reinforce immunization and vaccination as one of the most important ways to reduce the number of deaths caused by preventable diseases, and also to reinforce in their societies the safety and efficacy of vaccines, aiming at eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases. All states should strengthen public health surveillance and data systems, improve routine immunization and vaccination capacities, including by providing evidence-based information on countering vaccine hesitancy, and expand vaccine coverage to prevent outbreaks, as well as the spread and re-emergence of communicable and non-communicable diseases, including for vaccine-preventable diseases already eliminated.

Under the current emergencies provoked by COVID-19, special attention should be paid to the recommendation that states should enhance cooperation at the national, regional and global levels to address antimicrobial resistance, using an integrated and systems-based one health approach, including through health system strengthening, capacity-building, including for research and regulatory capacity, and technical support and ensure equitable access to affordable, safe, effective and quality existing and new antimicrobial medicines, vaccines and diagnostics, as well as effective stewardship, as antimicrobial resistance poses a challenge to achieving universal health coverage.

A promise

It should be reminded that in a lucid assessment of the situation, the WHO came to the conclusion that it is still possible to interrupt coronavirus spread, provided that countries put in place strong measures to detect disease early, isolate and treat cases, trace contacts, and promote social distancing measures commensurate with the risk.

At the same time, the WHO formulated an imperative prerequisite for the success of robust collective efforts. Yet, the global community should continue to demonstrate solidarity and cooperation, in supporting each other on the identification of the source of this new virus, its full potential for human-to-human transmission, preparedness for potential importation of cases, and research for developing necessary treatment.

It is not the purpose of these pages to present in detail all the relevant provisions of the resolution “Global health and foreign policy: an inclusive approach to strengthening health systems” which should be on the mandatory reading list of all decision-makers in nearly 200 states and territories.

But it is also appropriate to remind that as early as 19 February 2000 the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) adopted by consensus a document entitled “Bangkok Declaration: Global Dialogue and Dynamic Engagement” which contains relevant provisions fully applicable during coronavirus times.

According to this Declaration, “Solidarity and a strong sense of moral responsibility must be the guiding light of national and international policy. They are not only ethical imperatives, but also prerequisites for a prosperous, peaceful and secure world based on true partnership”.

In the light of this requirement, in 2020, multilateral diplomacy must be aware that more inclusive, transparent and participatory institutional arrangements are necessary to fight COVID-19 at the global level.

What is really urgent is to put into practice the recommendations contained in the report of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, – a document insufficiently publicized by mass-media, – entitled “Shared responsibility and global solidarity in response to the impacts of COVID-19”¹³. In the final part of this report, the UN Secretary-General stated: “What the world needs now is solidarity. With solidarity we can defeat the virus and build a better world”. The same idea was strongly reiterated before the UN Security Council on April 9, in an informal meeting. António Guterres re-emphasised the idea that to prevail against COVID-19, we will need to work together. That means heightened solidarity.¹⁴ At the end of this meeting, the Security Council issued a press statement expressing support for the Secretary-General’s efforts concerning the potential impact of the pandemic to conflict-affected countries, and the need for unity and solidarity with all those affected.¹⁵

From this new perspective, it appears that multilateral diplomacy in international organizations can be successful if and when it is animated by global solidarity.

In the Extraordinary G20 Leaders’ Summit Statement on COVID-19, it is clearly reaffirmed that “Global action, solidarity and international cooperation are more than ever necessary to address this pandemic”. Why? G20 answered: “The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic is a powerful reminder of our interconnectedness and vulnerabilities. The virus respects no borders”.¹⁶

These cogent ideas have been further developed under the pressure of tragic events worldwide by the UN General Assembly in resolution A/

¹³ The report was published as a brochure and is available in extenso at <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/shared-responsibility-global-solidarity-responding-socio-economic-impacts-covid-19>

¹⁴ The UN Secretary-General’s Statement is available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/content/secretary-general>

¹⁵ The press statement of the Security Council is available at <https://un.mfa.ee/news/>

¹⁶ The G20 Joint Statement on COVID-20 is available at [https://g20.org/en/media/Documents/G20_Extraordinary%20G20%20Leaders%E2%80%99%20Summit_Statement_EN%20\(3\).pdf](https://g20.org/en/media/Documents/G20_Extraordinary%20G20%20Leaders%E2%80%99%20Summit_Statement_EN%20(3).pdf)

RES/74/270 of 3 April 2020 entitled *Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)*.¹⁷

The text of the resolution was initiated and negotiated on the initiative of a great group of developing countries. Many other countries, including Romania, from all geographical areas, joined as co-sponsors the initial draft resolution which was approved by silence procedure.

The resolution has a relatively short preamble which constitutes a summarized view of the sponsors about the threat to human health, safety and well-being caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which continues to spread globally.

193 UN Members recognized in the preambular part of this diplomatic document by the voice of UNGA the unprecedented effects of the pandemic, including the severe disruption to societies and economies, as well as to global travel and commerce, and the devastating impact on the livelihood of people.

The UNGA also recognized the central role of the UN system in catalysing and coordinating the global response to control and contain the spread of COVID-19 and acknowledged in this regard the crucial role played by the WHO.

At the same time, in the operative part of the resolution, the UNGA recognized that the COVID-19 pandemic requires a global response based on unity, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation, and reaffirmed its commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism and its strong support for the central role of the United Nations system in the global response to this pandemic.

An important idea was expressed in the second paragraph of the operative part of the resolution in which the UNGA emphasized the need for full respect for human rights, and stressed that there is no place for any form of discrimination, racism and xenophobia in the response to the pandemic.

In a distinct paragraph, the UNGA expressed its profound condolences to and solidarity with the families and societies whose people have lost their lives to the disease, those who are battling for their survival and those whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by the crisis.

An interesting idea, relevant also for Romania, is advanced in a special paragraph in which the UNGA expressed its gratitude and support to all frontline health-care workers, medical professionals, scientists and researchers, as well as other essential workers around the world who are working under difficult and challenging circumstances to deal with COVID-19.

To the question of what must be done in the future, the UNGA had a clear answer. It called for intensified international cooperation to contain,

¹⁷ Resolution A/RES/74/270 is available in the document indicated in note 4 supra.

mitigate and defeat the pandemic, including by exchanging information, scientific knowledge and best practices and by applying the relevant guidelines recommended by the WHO.

In the same context, the UNGA renewed its commitment to help people and societies in special situations, in particular the weakest and most vulnerable, and recognized that many governments had offered their assistance and support to others in a spirit of solidarity and mutual support.

More specifically, the UNGA reaffirmed its full commitment to the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, and, in this regard, it underlined the need for the United Nations system to work as one to support all governments.

It is important to remind that, in the final part of the resolution, the UNGA expressed optimism that the unprecedented crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic can be mitigated and successfully reversed through leadership and sustained global cooperation and solidarity.

The last paragraph of the resolution contains an appeal addressed to the UN system, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, to work with all relevant actors in order to mobilize a coordinated global response to the COVID-19 and its adverse social, economic and financial impact on all societies.

A more specific answer to the question about concrete modalities of fighting COVID-19 was given by another UNGA adopted on 20 April 2020.

Under the symbol 74/274 and the title *International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment* the UNGA opens this document by a Preamble containing references to resolutions 74/270 of 2 April 2020 and 74/2 of 10 October 2019.¹⁸

The Preamble continues by noting with concern the threat to human health, safety and well-being caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, which has spread all around the globe, as well as the unprecedented and multifaceted effects of the pandemic, including the severe disruption to societies, economies, global trade and travel and the devastating impact on the livelihoods of people.

In the same context, the UNGA recognizes the competence, generosity and personal sacrifice of health-care professionals and services in the exercise of their duties to contain the spread of the pandemic.

The UNGA also reaffirms the right of every human being, without distinction of any kind, to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and notes that the poor and the most vulnerable

¹⁸ The resolution under consideration was adopted by silence procedure and is available in the final form in the document indicated in note 4 supra.

people are the most affected and that the impact of the pandemic will have repercussions on development gains, hampering progress in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Underscoring that equitable access to health products is a global priority and that the availability, accessibility, acceptability and affordability of health products of assured quality are fundamental to tackling the pandemic, the UNGA recognizes the importance of international cooperation and effective multilateralism in helping to ensure that all States have in place effective national protective measures, access to and flow of vital medical supplies, medicines and vaccines, in order to minimize the negative effects in all affected States and to avoid relapses of the pandemic.

A fundamental idea expressed in the Preamble is the clear recognition of the fact that the COVID-19 global pandemic requires a global response based on *unity, solidarity and multilateral cooperation* (emphasis added).

There are five operative paragraphs in the resolution under consideration. We will summarize the whole document using strictly its original terminology, as we have also done for all documents mentioned in the present article.

The first paragraph reaffirms the fundamental role of the United Nations system in coordinating the global response to control and contain the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and in supporting Member States, and in this regard, UNGA acknowledges in clear language the crucial leading role played by the World Health Organization.

In paragraph 2, the UNGA requests the Secretary-General, in close collaboration with the World Health Organization and other relevant agencies of the United Nations system, including the international financial institutions, to identify and recommend options, including approaches to rapidly scaling manufacturing and strengthening supply chains that promote and ensure fair, transparent, equitable, efficient and timely access to and distribution of preventive tools, laboratory testing, reagents and supporting materials, essential medical supplies, new diagnostics, drugs and future COVID-19 vaccines, with a view to making them available to all those in need, in particular in developing countries.

By paragraph 3, the UNGA encourages Member States to work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to increase research and development funding for vaccines and medicines, leverage digital technologies, and strengthen scientific international cooperation necessary to combat COVID-19 and to bolster coordination, including with the private sector, towards rapid development, manufacturing and distribution of diagnostics, antiviral medicines, personal protective equipment and vaccines, adhering to the objectives of efficacy, safety, equity, accessibility, and affordability.

In paragraph 4, the UNGA calls upon Member States and other relevant stakeholders to immediately take steps to prevent, within their respective legal frameworks, speculation and undue stockpiling that may hinder access to safe, effective and affordable essential medicines, vaccines, personal protective equipment and medical equipment, as may be required to effectively address COVID-19.

Finally, in paragraph 5, the UNGA requests the Secretary-General, in close collaboration with the World Health Organization, to take the necessary steps to effectively coordinate and follow up on the efforts of the United Nations system to promote and ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment needed to face COVID-19, and, in this regard, to consider establishing, within existing resources, an inter-agency task force, and to brief the General Assembly on such efforts, as appropriate.

Borderless solidarity

While welcoming this diplomatic document, it should be reminded that for its genuine implementation diplomacy is obliged to work under highly stressful conditions. For doing that, it has to be fully involved in catalysing changes at the deepest level of beliefs, assumptions, and values, as well as behaviours of nations.

From a strictly diplomatic perspective, it is appropriate to quote a strong positive reaction contained in the document entitled *COVID-19 – Joint Declaration of the Alliance for Multilateralism* (16 Apr. 2020), in which it is stated: “We welcome the unanimous adoption of UNGA resolution 74/270 on Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) at the initiative of Ghana, Indonesia, Liechtenstein, Norway, Singapore and Switzerland”.¹⁹

Religious leaders may have a significant role to play in the implementation of the UNGA’s resolutions on COVID-19. In his remarks at the highlevel video conference on “The Role of Religious Leaders in Addressing the Multiple Challenges of COVID-19”, in New York, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said:

“We are all vulnerable – and that shared vulnerability reveals our common humanity. It lays bare our responsibility to promote solidarity as the foundation of our response – a solidarity based on the human rights and human dignity of

¹⁹ The full text of the Joint Declaration is available at <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/united-nations/alliance-for-multilateralism-63158/article/covid-19-joint-declaration-of-the-alliance-for-multilateralism-16-apr-2020>

all. And it highlights the crucial role of religious leaders in your communities and beyond”.²⁰

In the same spirit, the UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, in her remarks, at the Economic and Social Council informal briefing “Joining Forces: Effective Policy Solutions for COVID-19 Response”, in New York said:

“COVID-19 knows no borders, and our response must show borderless solidarity. The Secretary-General established the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund in early April to help catalyse joint action by United Nations country teams to support the most vulnerable countries and communities”.²¹

It is obvious that COVID-19 has already illustrated the fact that even a single tragic event could easily change the face of life on this planet as we know it. Therefore, diplomats have to be prepared to move in several directions at once, both responding to whatever opportunities present themselves for positive and effective work for global health, and also by being pro-active in turning existing challenges into real opportunities.

What multilateral diplomacy practiced under the auspices of the UN and WHO can offer is to give people a perspective of what is possible, help them do what they can do to fight an invisible enemy, to do it faster and better, and consolidate their capacity to use appropriate tools and skills. In short, multilateral diplomacy should be able to motivate, catalyse, inspire, instruct, facilitate, encourage, support, assist and demonstrate.

In this regard, a persuasive test on solidarity as practiced through the instrumentality of multilateral diplomacy will be visible in September this year, when the most significant world organization will start the 75th session of the UN General Assembly during which 193 Member States will consider a report prepared by the UN Secretary-General, in close collaboration with the Director-General of the WHO, in which they have to address, *inter alia*, the challenges and opportunities of inclusive approaches to strengthening health systems in the context of universal health coverage.

This report and its consideration cannot be anymore a routine exercise. “Business as usual” approach while discussing global health issues must be history. Multilateral diplomacy must find specific answers to the fundamental question about how to identify ways and means to give tangibility to the ideal of global solidarity, as expressed in the resolutions summarized above, in a world characterized by unprecedented vulnerabilities, perplexities and discontinuities. Bilateral diplomacy is already deeply affected (at the time of writing, many embassies are closed to the public), while multilateral

²⁰ See <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2020-05-12/remarks-role-of-religious-leaders-addressing-multiple-challenges-of-covid-19>

²¹ See <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/dsg/statement/2020-05-11/deputy-secretary-generals-remarks-the-ecosoc-informal-briefing-covid-19-response-prepared-for-delivery>

diplomacy is under terrible stress, functioning online, with all imaginable and non-imaginable difficulties.

This will be a formidable test in the diplomatic process which may succeed if, at last, the world community of nations demonstrates its political capacity to overcome temporary disagreements and contradictions and work together in harmony for the benefit of humanity. This success is essential for future general trust, as, to quote again Henry Kissinger, “Sustaining the public trust is crucial to social solidarity, to the relation of societies with each other, and to international peace and stability”²²

Trust is not a spontaneous phenomenon, and an imperative prerequisite for its authentic birth is a genuine good faith understanding between the five permanent members of the UN Security Council to fight together, in a spirit of solidarity, the COVID-19, as a common enemy threatening human life at the planetary level.

A moderate optimism can be expressed on this promising ideal. Why this optimism can be only a moderate one?

In a letter to the Editor published in the Bangkok Post, dated 4 May 2020, JeanVictor Pierre Krier, a reader of this Thai daily, in his letter entitled *On road to nowhere*, asserts that “we all share universal values, such as democracy, tolerance, solidarity and respect for human dignity”. However, he added: “... it is still depressing that despite the worldwide chaos in the fight to win the war against the coronavirus pandemic, we are still going nowhere”. And he concludes his comments by asking: “...have you ever heard of Mother Nature’s ‘eternal and unchangeable’ law of eternity, that only the strongest and fittest on planet Earth will survive?” Knowing that the answer to this legitimate question is ambiguous, no final conclusions can be formulated about immediate future.

Preliminary conclusions

From a purely diplomatic perspective, it can be asserted that in the world of diplomacy, gone are the days of handshakes, bilateral meetings, or international summits attracting a horde of world leaders and diplomats to discuss issues of the day.

World leaders will be more frequently requested to hold over their foreign policy goals and prioritize global responses to the COVID-19.

Traditional diplomacy will cross a transformational process, quite often superseded by virtual video conferences devoid of close personal contact that has been deemed indispensable in carrying out international affairs.²³

²² See note 10 supra.

²³ On UNGA’s video conferences, see the press release available at <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/ga12244.doc.htm>

While the development of cybersecurity and infrastructure capable of supporting fast and reliable connectivity will be an important objective, one change in the post-COVID-19 world could be global multilateral diplomacy turning in many cases to online diplomacy.

A recent example is quite eloquent in this regard. On 8 May 2020 the UNGA President informed that the General Assembly would continue to adopt decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic under silence procedure until the end of June 2020 and that the subsidiary bodies of the Assembly may apply the same procedure. It should also be reminded that he expressed his solidarity with Member States who are fighting COVID-19.²⁴

On 2 May 2020, Dr Abdullah Al-Ahsan, Professor of Comparative Civilisation at Istanbul Sehir University, Turkey, in a highly informative article entitled *Post Coronavirus World: Could we expect a better Domain?* asserted the following: “The coronavirus pandemic is not over yet and anyone hardly knows when and how it will end.[...] The current situation is very worrisome, and everyone wants to get out of it as soon as possible.[...] Although there is a consensus that the world will be different in post-coronavirus atmosphere, there are sharp disagreements on the nature of those states of affairs”. “Global trade will partly recover, but more of it will be managed by governments rather than markets”, says Richard Haas, president of the Council of Foreign Relations. He also believes that “Civil liberties will be treated by many as a casualty of war”, and “Ideally, the crisis would bring renewed commitment to building a more robust international order.” Stephen Walt, a Harvard academic, thinks that since the 1918 “influenza did not change the big power rivalry;” this pandemic too will “strengthen the state and reinforce nationalism.”²⁵

To continue this idea, it should be noted that the most recent events in the sphere of multilateral diplomacy offer persuasive proves that beyond any ambiguity states as subjects of public international law are becoming much stronger and more active during, and, by all means, after COVID-19 Post Coronavirus World. Could we expect a better domain that has already generated the start of a new stage in global order?

The final answer is on the waiting list. A major precondition for a positive answer is genuine borderless solidarity in fighting COVID-19. Therefore, promising events in that direction deserve to be welcomed and supported by appropriate action.

²⁴ The UNGA's President decisions are available at <https://www.un.org/pga/74/covid-19/>

²⁵ For the full text of the article, see <http://www.just-international.org/mediastatement/post-coronavirus-world-could-we-expect-a-better-domain/>

Acting in the spirit of authentic solidarity, the Republic of Korea, Canada, Denmark, Qatar and Sierra Leone decided in May 2020 to launch the “UN Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security”²⁶.

This is a forum for free discussions and stronger cooperation on health security issues, including COVID-19, within the United Nations system, operating as an open-ended group, and other UN member states can participate in its activities.

The general approach in this sensitive field must be realistic. This requirement became obvious during a recent virtual meeting of the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), which brought together the principals of 31 UN system entities.

CEB is the longest-standing and highest-level coordination forum of the UN system. Addressing the CEB meeting on 14 May 2020, António Guterres said: “What is clear today is the fragility of humankind and the planet. With all the scientific progress we still don’t know how to deal with a virus, we are so unprepared. It is clear there is not enough humility, unity and not enough solidarity in the world.”²⁷

Indeed, the world community of nations has to overcome the current deficits of true solidarity.

This warning has to be seriously taken into account in the sphere of multilateral diplomacy during and after COVID-19 period.

An auspicious organizational occasion for further developments in this field will be offered by the celebration in 2021 of the International Year of Peace and Trust decided by the UNGA on 12 September 2019. In accordance with resolution A/RES/73/338 co-sponsored by many countries, “the International Year of Peace and Trust constitutes a means of mobilizing the efforts of the international community to promote peace and trust among nations based on, *inter alia*, political dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation, in order to build sustainable peace, solidarity and harmony”²⁸.

In the process of preparation and celebration of this Year, the “UN Group of Friends of Solidarity for Global Health Security” could organize open-ended consultations to further define values binding all states in their mutual relations, including partnerships and diplomatic practices in favour of global health. The concept of confidence-building measures, which is quite familiar in multilateral diplomacy practiced under the UN auspices, might provide some useful guidance in promoting global health.

²⁶ The creation of this group was ignored by mainstream mass-media. For the launching of the group, see http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=321088

²⁷ For details, see <https://e-nnw.com/un-secretary-general-chairs-un-system-chief-executives-board-for-coordination-ceb-meeting/>

²⁸ For the full text of the resolution adopted on September 12, 2019, see <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/73/338>.

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