



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

**Political will and intersectorality to confront COVID-19 in Cuba**

**Voluntad política e intersectorialidad para el enfrentamiento a la COVID-19 en Cuba**

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*Dear Editor:*

We have read the editorial headlined: “Severe acute respiratory infection (COVID-19): an imminent threat”<sup>(1)</sup> published in the latest issue of your journal that refers to the new threat that this new infection represents, which has been declared as a worldwide pandemic by the WHO and we want to comment on this.

At the end of December, 2019 in Wuhan, China different cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology were discovered. Some days after, the causative agent of this pneumonia was identified

as a new coronavirus. This causal virus was named as SARS-Cov-2 by the International Virus Taxonomy Committee; then, the WHO named it as: 2019-nCov virus. Also, the pneumonia caused by this viral infection was named as: pneumonia caused by coronavirus. (COVID-19).<sup>(2,3)</sup> The epidemic has spread outside China and it is present in more than 182 countries all over the world, which led the WHO to declare it a pandemic.<sup>(4)</sup>

It is not accidental that China directed all its



efforts to overcome this epidemic and control the transmission of cases.<sup>(5)</sup> The experience has demonstrated that countries with political will, integration of sectors, organizations and institutions, are more successful than countries that do not have these attributes where mercantilist interests predominate in confronting the COVID-19 epidemic.<sup>(6)</sup>

Italy is a country 20 times smaller than China; however, the number of deaths from the coronavirus disease 2019 exceeds the number of deaths in China.<sup>(7)</sup> Chinese experts, who initially advised that country,<sup>(8)</sup> criticized the laxity of confinement policies in that European nation<sup>(9)</sup> which means that it does not only translates into the need for greater epidemiological rigor, but in greater intersectoral collaboration.

Cuba, an economically blocked country, has no qualms about declaring drastic measures to benefit the defense and salvation of human lives, reflecting the political will of the government and the party, bringing together all the organizations, institutions and sectors, which characterize a true work of social participation and intersectorality.<sup>(10)</sup>

In the country, almost all effective public policies have been established to contain the COVID-19 epidemic: isolation, quarantines, social distancing, reorganization of commerce, reorganization of labor, travel restrictions, community participation, etc.;<sup>(6)</sup> all of this has been done under the precepts that characterize the practice of political will, social and intersectoral participation in Cuba:

1) Pro-active action: before the problem arises,

anticipating the evolution of the epidemic in the world and in the country itself.

- 2) Top-down and bottom-up interventions with joint feedback of good practices (from the central level to the periphery and vice versa): Measures emanating from the central level are declared, but they are improved with initiatives at the local level, which become official measures.
- 3) Actions based on evidence of the best experiences of effectiveness taken from the different parts of the world where the epidemic has been faced, especially in China and other countries.<sup>(11)</sup>
- 4) Advantages of the previous installation of structural framework in the country (intersectoral health councils and commissions), apart from inter-sectoral and inter-institutional ad hoc meetings.
- 5) Solidarity approach: Cuba not only provides technical assistance from its accumulated experience in controlling the epidemic, but also provides assistance to countries that request it; an example of this is the support and attention given to the British cruise ship MS Braemar, assistance that has been denied by other nations and where all the security measures required by the WHO and the country itself were taken.<sup>(12)</sup> Another example is the sending of 53 doctors and nurses to help in one of the most affected regions of Italy and other countries from the Caribbean that needed help.<sup>(13,14)</sup>
- 6) Actions based on efficiency: the epidemic is addressed from the country's internal



strengths, without neglecting the weaknesses and the national economy.<sup>(10)</sup>

- 7) Permanent attention to the criticisms and suggestions of the people, not only directly, but also through the mass media and social networks.
- 8) Community and popular participation: a reliable example is the spontaneous initiatives of seamstresses to make face masks by their own means and offer them to those who need them.<sup>(10)</sup>
- 9) Interactive feedback: all the new experiences collected have been incorporated into the resource that already existed in Cuba for coping with other epidemics. Furthermore, some measures have been incorporated or improved, such as hand washing at the entrance of public establishments with sodium hypochlorite 0,1 %.<sup>(10)</sup>
- 10) Participation of high-level scientific institutions: an example is the initiative of the Center for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CIGB) of Cuba that has a vaccine design that could be used against the new coronavirus Sars-CoV-2 that causes Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).<sup>(15)</sup>

In the country there are examples of intersectoral actions, which are made public through their own promoters: President of the Republic, Prime Minister, heads of ministries and other authorities who personally explain the measures to the people through all communication media and massive social networks, until the issue is exhausted and doubts are clarified. These actions are carried out live and direct at an exact time and are broadcasted the same day at night.

The main way for making these appearances is the popular "*Mesa Redonda*" television program that is broadcasted during primetime.

These measures include those of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, which has promoted remote work or telecommuting in all activities that allow such action, in which the worker earns 100 % of his basic salary in the first month and then, the 60 % while the work modality lasts. Another example is that the Ministry of Public Health trains medical and health science students, all health workers and professionals, in face-to-face and online modalities who, in turn, train and guide other sectors and the population through talks, audiences and other health education activities. Other measures have been developed in sectors such as Commerce, Education, Culture, MINTUR, Transport and others related to the Central State Administration.

These are some of the measures of some striking sectors; all sectors, institutions and organizations are involved in the strategy for coping with the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).<sup>(16)</sup>

The lessons learned in recent weeks from other nations with successful experiences and the very practice of our country while facing other epidemics, demonstrate that only a conscious political will, based on humanism and the joint work of the public and private sector parties working together with mass organizations, community, state and religious organizations and institutions, etc., can contain and control an epidemic, taking into account the aforementioned precepts.



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### Conflict of interests

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests.

