In the face of the continuing spread of COVID-19, the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness expresses solidarity with the peoples of the world, especially the poor and vulnerable communities in developed and developing countries. We also salute those in the frontlines, most of all the health workers who bravely continue to serve the people.

Beyond its tangible impacts on our health and lives, we believe that COVID-19 bares an underlying pandemic of inequality, which renders the majority and bottom rung of our society more vulnerable to health crises. We bear witness to the plight of our brothers and sisters who endure squalid conditions, in environments with poor access to nutrition, water, and sanitation, among other prerequisites for a healthy life. We are deeply concerned about the elderly, women and children, migrants and refugees, and persons with disability. It is they who bear the brunt of this crisis, and should be prioritised as we face this pandemic.

We call for concrete responses from our governments, the duty-bearers, to ensure that we will soldier through this together. More importantly, we urge them to rethink the way we run the world, to narrow the gap that led us here.

Today’s inequality was built over decades of relentless pursuit of profit, supported by development policies not predicated on people’s needs. Its impact now stares us in the face and teaches us important lessons about progress and humanity: what ails one ails us all, what elevates one, must elevate us all. And when we pursue growth at the expense of others, we suffer as a human race.

This pandemic reminds us, painfully, of the folly of turning our backs on society. Our interdependence as members of the human race demands that we look after each other, which we do through the good offices of the State. Thus, the State is responsible for pooled national resources: education and healthcare systems, mass transport, and utilities, among others.

But the last 50 years have been marked by dereliction of this responsibility. We see governments neglecting to invest in universal social protection, health, education, housing, and other public services. Instead, they are handing over their power and responsibilities to corporations, whose approaches are governed by the logic of capital. For the healthcare sector in particular, this means enormous cuts on national health budgets, widespread privatisation of government hospitals and contractualisation.
of healthcare workers, paltry investments on health promotion and preventive medicine, and profit-oriented drug development practice. These policies, along with the coronavirus, are what had brought about the real impact of the pandemic.

We must respond to this denial of social justice.

As civil society, we emphasise the need for effective development cooperation in aiding efforts to alleviate poverty and inequality. We reiterate a call for development efforts that advance the countries’ interests, focus on results, uphold transparency and accountability, encourage inclusive partnerships, and put primacy on human rights.

We encourage all development partners, and donors in particular, not to withdraw from their commitments in the face of such trying times and, rather, to plan for additional initiatives, and allow such arrangements as no-cost extensions and flexibility in the use of funds, duration, and implementation to better respond to the evolving situation. In fact, those most in need around the globe are very likely to be hit twice: directly due to COVID-19 outbreaks and also due to disruption of existing programmes and projects. Instead, effective development cooperation can be part of the response to the current crisis.

In the short-term, we advocate the following health-focused measures: the conduct of mass testing, where needed, and treatment without prejudice to people's capacity to pay, prompt and precise public information campaigns, and distribution of state-subsidised goods such as masks, sanitisers, and food. We also demand concrete support for frontline health workers, immediate action to ensure food security, and declarations of work stoppages, where appropriate, while guaranteeing income for all affected citizens.

In the long-term, we call for greater government investment in our public healthcare systems, free education and housing, domestic economies designed to provide decent work for all, and the strengthening of the State's ability to ensure that the least of its citizens have access to social protection.

In their delivery of these responses, States should consider differentiated impacts of COVID-19 on the elderly, women and girls, indigenous people, and the poor. The needs of vulnerable groups should be given particular attention.

We recognise that the science of the pandemic indicates that social distancing is most effective in stemming it. However, its enforcement must not come at the cost of people's exercise of their rights. Prior to COVID-19, many states have already been severely limiting civic participation, on top of an ongoing trend of shrinking civic space. In some repressive states or fragile democracies, these measures could become permanent, with those in power taking advantage of the pandemic to establish or preserve their authoritarian regimes.

Military solutions, with state terror unleashed with impunity particularly on the poorer segments of the population, are totally unacceptable as a response. Anything that violates human rights, jeopardises democracy, and perpetuates inequality cannot be the answer.

This pandemic also highlights the continuing importance of CSOs as development watchdogs, as advocates of policies and programmes that have lasting impact on people's welfare. States and other development stakeholders must then address the global pattern of shrinking civic space and heightened political repression, and fulfill their commitments in fostering an enabling environment for civil society.

When our world leaders sit down again to discuss their development agenda, we hope that the awful reality of COVID-19 forces them to consider what their decisions mean to the displaced peoples in Latin America, to the banditry- and insurgency-ravaged African communities, and to the homeless and destitute families of South and Southeast Asia. We ask them to set the path for the redistribution of the world's wealth and to promote development that truly leaves no one behind.

Ultimately, COVID-19 presents us with the challenge of rebuilding the social fabric that the dominant world order has destroyed. It has highlighted that looking after each other must be a collective endeavor, that whatever goals we set for our society and economy must be for the greater good.

A pandemic calls for international solidarity. There is no alternative.