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With COVID-19, the health and well-being of millions of people were abruptly put in danger and half of the world's population forced into confinement. Our economies and the very structure of our societies have been shaken and put the multilateralism at a test.

And the crisis has yet not finished unwinding its negative impact.

Here in Europe where only 7% of people have been infected with the coronavirus so far, the Institute of Health Metrics at the University of Washington, predicted a few days ago that daily deaths from COVID-19 will continue to rise in the coming weeks, reaching a peak only around mid-January, with hospitals being stretched to breaking point from December to the end of February.

Against a certain lack of interest in health issues that has been prevailing in recent years, the world is realizing how much, among all global issues, it is health that, in the short term, has the greatest potential of disruption in our globalized world.

I find it encouraging to see, on this occasion, a near-consensus forging on the importance of science as a basis of health policies and on the priority given to the safety of people over economic considerations, even at high cost.

Public health is a political choice that most countries have made in this crisis against competing priorities and interests.

To say that the virus affects us all does not mean, however, that it affects us all equally. We have seen countries competing for resources, whether for masks, as we saw in the first wave of the pandemic here in Europe, diagnostic tests or now, vaccines. It is not difficult to guess who will emerge a winner in such a competition in the absence of global regulation, global governance, and of common resources for common goods.

The unprecedented crisis we are facing requires unprecedented global solidarity. In his wake-up call last July, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, called on the global community to move from international chaos to the construction of an international global community capable of meeting and solving tomorrow's challenges.

Clearly, a pandemic response rooted in global cooperation makes everyone safer.

Of course, it demands an emergency response. But it must also encourage us, beyond the emergency, to lay the foundations for a world that is more united and more resilient in the face of challenges, which will have to go beyond the current geopolitical equilibria to involve more the major emerging players, China obviously, but also India, Russia, Latin America and Africa.

The crisis Europe and the world are facing is not only about health, it is about politics too. This why today, for the first time the WPC is dedicating a side-conference to health.

Our session today will run in two parts. First, Professor Antoine Flahault will present us with an overview of the pandemic from an epidemiological and global public health perspective. That will be followed by specific questions and answers that you may direct to him and his presentation. We will then proceed to a panel discussion with eminent participants from the pharmaceutical industry, the social protection sector, public health, and the UN global angle. Questions and answers between the panelists and between the attendees and the panelists will follow the presentations by all four speakers. As I see it, the objective of this session is to discuss the first lessons from the COVID-19 crisis, at the intersection of public health at national level, global health at global level, health systems, social protection, innovation to generate health commodities (medicines and vaccines), economy, politics, the global order, and global governance.

With that, I would like to call on our first speaker, Professor Antoine Flahault, Director of the Institute of Global Health at the University of Geneva.