

# Statement on state and governance in COVID-19 pandemic

*World Emergency COVID19 Pandemic Ethics (WeCope) Committee (18 August 2020)*

As an independent, multidisciplinary, and cross-cultural committee, comprised of ethicists from cultures and nations across the world, in the context of our previous statements, we offer the following recommendations on the concepts of State and Governance in COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The pivotal role of government in global health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be downplayed. In fact, the government is the primary responder, strategic planner, policy maker, peace and order keeper, financier, provider, program implementer, among others. Failure in government response to any pandemic can result to uncontrolled infection spread, deaths, economic collapse, social unrest, hunger, violence, and other crises that may lead to the collapse of the same government that has sworn to protect and defend its people from harm.

Looking back at the history of pandemics we can see government that were resilient, sharp, decisive, humane, caring and concerned, crisis prepared, excellent crisis manager, quick responder, with foresight, very good in managing people and public order and peace, cohesive, systematic, reasonable, and respected as it was able to command educated obedience and calm.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed some problems on resiliency, crisis preparedness, leadership, and management of governments around the world. In particular, it exposed the growing disparity between state and the people as seen in mass defiance of state policies and protocols in response to the pandemic around the world. The pandemic did not only reveal some striking failures of leadership and policymaking in some states resulting in more deaths and high infection rates, but also excellence in management by some state leaders.

We have seen in the news how governments around the world are responding to the challenges of Covid-19, some desperately, others steadily. Efforts of governments to control the spread of the disease and prevent more deaths and harm to society and people come in variety of ways and effects: from imposition of lockdowns and community quarantines to the use of military and police forces in imposing discipline, peace and order, and delivery of essential services; from granting emergency powers to chief executives to creating abruptly prepared laws, policies, and protocols; from shutting down economic powerhouses to

---

<sup>1</sup> The chair of this WeCope Subcommittee is *Marlon Lofredo, Ph.D., St. Paul's University Quezon City, the Philippines (Email: [mpplofredo@spuqc.edu.ph](mailto:mpplofredo@spuqc.edu.ph))* The members of the drafting subcommittee include Marlon Lofredo, Thalia Arawi, Andrew Bosworth, Rhyddhi Chakraborty, Mireille D'Astous, Nilza Maria Diniz, Manuel Lozano Rodríguez, Darryl R.J. Macer, Maria do Céu Patrão Neves, Suma Parahakaran, Osama Rajhkan, Anke Weisheit,. This Statement draws on ideas and literature from many sources and benefited through comments from other persons as well. [https://www.eubios.info/world\\_emergency\\_covid19\\_pandemic\\_ethics\\_committee](https://www.eubios.info/world_emergency_covid19_pandemic_ethics_committee)

restricting some people's rights; from efforts to leave no one behind to eventual marginalization of the socially, physically, ethnically, and economically vulnerable, etc. Some governments are showing success, others are in dire need of guidance, order, and even oversight.

## **2. State as an Institution of Effective Leadership and Unified Action**

There is a great difference between power and leadership: the mere possession of power or being in a position of authority does not make one a leader. At the core of leadership is the ability to enable a group of people to achieve a goal that none of them could accomplish on their own, while political power is simply related to control, authority, and influence. State leaders are expected to be effective and unitive, especially in time of national emergencies, so is the system of governance in a State. Governance is the management of public affairs by State and non-state associations. State government is state leadership or management of public life. Government's effectiveness and unity are shown in different responsive, relevant, operative, efficient, and ethical ways and means of responding to the pandemic and its effects. Any government, national, state, provincial, community and/or tribal, and its leaders are expected to lead the people, and gain their collaboration, to a unified action against COVID-19. It is in this light that we present the following principles and recommendations.

***Recommendation 1: State policies and regulations promulgated for the prevention and control of COVID-19 need to be just, compassionate and humane, science-based, and truly responsive, non-discriminatory and equitable. This time of global health emergency is an opportunity, as well as a challenge, for governments around the world to prove themselves as resilient, cohesive, trustworthy, credible, and legitimate institutions capable of creating and implementing laws and policies that build resilient, cohesive, and trusting communities.***

- a) Policymakers should give credence to findings and recommendations of science and frontliners who are directly involved in actions to control the virus and provide healthcare to the infected. In this way, policies and regulations will be more responsive, effective, and efficient as they are enlightened by research and sound reasoning and judgment.
- b) Policies should be unifying and inclusive rather than divisive and exclusive, and guarantee reasonable, acceptable, and temporary limitations to some rights, privileges, and freedoms of the citizens. Policies should also take account of the less advantaged members of the population, the displaced and refugees who cannot follow pandemic control requirements for lack of available resources. This will guarantee social obedience and trust that no one will be left behind.
- c) Policymaking should involve not only the politicians, military and police officials, economic players, and key government officials, but also experts and community representatives in a collaborative effort to craft more responsive protocols that are proactive and not reactive, caring and loving, rather than punitive and militarized.

- d) Policies should strike a balance between conflicting goods, if possible. In a pandemic, it should never be a choice between economy and public health, nor between public order and peace and public health. If reasonable balance cannot be achieved, public health should be the priority. A sick populace is a sick economy, and an ailing country. While ensuring community security and order is important, greater attention and priority should be given to guaranteeing public safety and public health.
- e) Governments are also reminded to avoid too punitive and vindictive enforcement of pandemic policies and laws. It is beneficial to governments to always remember that laws and policies are meant to promote the general welfare of the people and not make their situation even worse.
- f) Government policies need to ensure that no one is left behind. Essential services should reach all, especially the most vulnerable members of society, and that all frontliners are properly equipped, protected, and supported.

***Recommendation 2: An organized and collaborative management system where line of command is clear working as a hub of credible, contrastable and formal information from which directives should be well-established. Such sources of information should be well-advised by scientists and healthcare experts. The role of these experts should never be taken for granted by state leaders and policy-makers since they are the ones who have an understanding, albeit evolving, of the nature and dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 and its resulting COVID-19.***

- a) It is recommended that State COVID-19 management teams should adopt the collaborative whole-of-society approach that inclusively engages all sectors of society to respond and find solutions to the problems posed by the pandemic, especially when resources are scarce. Governments need to listen to its people and the private sector since no one has a monopoly of solutions.
- b) Regular updates and progress reports from government and COVID-19 Management team officials should be done to assure the public of government support and concern, as well as to pacify public panic and resolve confusions. To ensure that State updates and reports are based on independent science it is highly recommended that expert members of the COVID-19 Management team deliver the information to the public, unless otherwise, it is demanded by situation that the State Chief Executive addresses the nation.
- c) Government should exploit all forms of communication, including the social media, to disseminate information and guidelines, and feedback on them, to ensure the public is well-educated on the nature, transmission, and morbidity of COVID-19, and guarantees public knowledge of disciplinary protocols to be followed. A well-known and recognized official source of information can quell the proliferation of fake news and disinformation. At the same time, creation of a variety of independent fact-checking organizations can enhance the veracity of information to ensure that different perspectives on inescapable ethical questions are considered. Where there are political differences in the use of scientific information, and choice of experts, this should be transparently acknowledged.

***Recommendation 3: Establishment of effective and efficient COVID-19 control systems aimed at zero infection and death, and total containment or even elimination of the virus.***

- a) States are encouraged to establish a system of effective control of COVID-19 which includes, but is not limited to, mass testing, establishment of safe quarantine and isolation facilities, wearing of clinically recommended face masks, and/or face coverings,<sup>2</sup> and physical distancing, localized community quarantines, and continuous information and education campaigns in mass media and all medium of communications on proper hygiene, regular hand-washing, and other safety and health practices and protocols.
- b) Social control policies should not ignore other aspects of general welfare or wellbeing such as livelihood, sustenance, education, economy, employment, and protection from domestic abuse and sexual offense. Effectively balancing the demands of these social goods vis-à-vis the challenges of the pandemic can contribute largely to controlling or preventing the spread of the virus and its corresponding social, psychological, and economic effects.
- c) Governments are encouraged to establish well-designed and operational public health infrastructures and institutions that are resilient, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and effective (i.e., can respond quickly) in handling pandemics and other health crisis; and, ensures that more than enough supply of necessary equipment and gadgets are available by stockpiling, in advance, essential emergency resources.
- d) Governments are called to support research and development of vaccines and treatment, and such activity should be a part and parcel of its pandemic management system.
- e) Scientists need to address the fundamental question of whether zero infection and death is actually possible, even in economically capable states, as has been illustrated by the reemergence of cases in quarantined island states, such as New Zealand. We recommend that a global assessment of the evidence should be transparently made in 2021, as the world has gained a year of epidemiological data from the attempts of all states in the world to face the pandemic.
- f) Governments need to fund independent research to assess all aspects of their attempts at control and mitigation of the COVID-19 pandemic, to establish workable good practices for each state and community.

***Recommendation 4: Government should ensure that allocated funds for COVID-19 response are efficiently and ethically spent.***

- a) A just, transparent and non-discriminatory macro and micro allocation and distribution of available resources and funds is needed to ensure everyone equitably benefits.
- b) Governments should assure the public that no resources, money or in kind, are lost in graft and corruption, by making regular public transparency reports as well as independent audits on government spending, borrowing and allocation. In this way,

---

<sup>2</sup> Although some states still have a shortage of face masks, or their price precludes universal access, face coverings are almost universally available.

public trust and confidence is guaranteed, and people become more obedient and cooperative in government programs and policies.

- c) The pandemic should not be used as an excuse or pretext for wanton exploitation of the easement of allocation and release of funds policies to prevent the flow of valuable and scarce funds to inappropriate programs, overpriced facilities and supplies, improper spending, and insatiable pockets.
- d) Mechanisms for accountability need to be strengthened.

### **3. Adherence to Principles of Human Rights and Democracy**

Respect and promotion of fundamental freedoms and human rights are the foundations of a free and caring nation. The protection of these human and social goods is essential to the State's legitimacy and continued existence. It's inherent to a socially responsible State to ensure that in all circumstances and situations, these are well safeguarded and advanced.

***Recommendation 5: Human rights and fundamental freedoms are not to be unwittingly and unnecessary compromised by the State in its COVID-19 management.***

- a) Governments ought to ensure that while strict measures to avert the further spread of COVID-19 are enforced, human rights and fundamental freedoms are carefully upheld. The enforcement of excessively harsh and severe measures to control movement of people has caused blatant violation of basic human rights, like imposing immediate physical punishment for violators, destruction of property, warrantless arrest, illegal detention, curtailment of freedom of expression, etc., whose victims are the poor and underprivileged while the rich and powerful are dealt with mercy and compassion and are excused of any liability. While certain concessions as to limitations of some freedom may be justified through quarantine and lockdowns to prevent further infection and death, the requirements of justice, fairness, equity, humanity, and dignity are not overlooked or altogether sidelined.
- b) Governments need to ensure that the practice of police power does not infringe on constitutional rights to life, liberty, due process of law, and privacy. Ethical management of COVID-19 requires a reasonable and justifiable balance between police power and protection and promotion of general welfare, a crucial principle that every government should remember.
- c) Constructive dialogue and open communication between the government and the people can be established to discuss policies and protocols on COVID-19 response and management so understanding and agreement on reasonable limitations of certain rights and freedoms can be peaceably reached.
- d) Governments are obliged to guarantee that law enforcement agencies and deputized peace and order personnel are well informed of the limitations set by human rights and fundamental freedoms to avoid abuses of power resulting to unnecessary violations and lawsuits.

- e) While contact tracing is very important in averting further spread of the virus, this should not be used as a pretext to unwanted monitoring and surveillance with the intention of illegitimately and covertly gathering intelligence data that can be used against opposition, government critics, activist, and advocacy groups. Amidst the global emergency, States are under obligation to ensure that the fundamental freedom and right to privacy be safeguarded and respected, unless otherwise, the exercise of such right becomes an active threat to public health and safety. In relation to this, governments should be very careful not to violate informed consent and privacy in the use of wearable technologies or tracking devices. It is well for governments to keep in mind that the central objective of all efforts against COVID-19 is to stop its spread and potency, and any policy or law that disrespects human rights and fundamental freedoms are unreasonable, unethical, and a blatant violation of human dignity.

***Recommendation 6: The principle of checks and balances is not to be sacrificed.***

- a) While cooperation and solidarity among the branches of government is extremely necessary to end the COVID-19 pandemic, checks and balances should not be sacrificed. The Executive department should not be handed grand and limitless powers by Parliament or Congress in order to avoid authoritarianism and implementation of draconian measures that may not necessarily be for the prevention of COVID-19 pandemic, but are aimed to further their grip of power and personal or party agenda.
- b) The separation of powers should be safeguarded for the benefit of the state, such as ensuring the independence of the judiciary and mechanisms for oversight and accountability.

***Recommendation 7: Vigilance against authoritarianism and legislative excess.***

- a) Since public demonstration against what is perceived to be unjust and unfair, excess and deficiency, are limited or impossible during pandemics because of lockdowns and strict quarantine rules (physical distancing), there are reports of governments sneakily passing legislations that further the authoritarian and dictatorial powers of abusive and power-hungry regimes. Besides, in some cases, Congressmen and Ministers of Parliament cannot even meet face to face to engage in debates, so it is easier to pass legislation in a time of pandemic where legislators merely watch and debate via videoconferencing.
- b) Moreover, the pandemic has become a justification for the legislation of draconian laws that further limit the freedom and rights of people. Special or emergency powers given to the Chief Executive are further extended, sometimes giving the President or Prime Minister unlimited power to implement whatever measures they want to impose beyond the limits set in the country's fundamental law.
- c) National emergencies are a good opportunity for tyrants and authoritarians to further their grip of power, so an independent and strong-willed legislative and judicial department are necessary to check and balance the executive department to prevent excesses and abuses.
- d) Legitimate protests against what is perceived to be an excess and deficiency in the State's COVID-19 management should not be perceived as a threat to the government's legitimacy and power, much worse, like in some countries, seen as a terrorist act jeopardizing government efforts to stop the pandemic. Rather they are to be recognized

as constructive criticism and essential contributions to the improvement of government programs and plans against COVID-19.

#### **4. Preparedness**

The experiences and lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic should encourage and inspire governments to establish and institutionalize more responsive, effective, and efficient emergency and crisis preparedness and management guidelines and infrastructures. Such emergency and crisis preparedness and management blueprint should be inspired by sound science, credible information, and ethics principles.

***Recommendation 8: While we can never be perfectly prepared to respond to pandemics since they are of different natures and dynamics, governments can learn from previous cases more adequately, to the utmost of their capacity and ability, to prepare for the next case by establishing a national framework for action in times of global health emergencies, that can be activated anytime a new one occurs.***

- a) Governments are now obliged to institutionalize a national health care emergency framework if they have none, or if they have, to revisit and revise it based on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- b) The whole-of-society approach to preparedness and response is highly recommended, where first response and management begins in the community level, with independent trained crisis managers and relevant resources.
- c) Governments should invest in pandemic response infrastructures and equipment since crises like this are not uncommon anymore, including advanced vulnerability and risk assessments, and research and development support.
- d) Health care emergency lessons should be integrated in the education system to educate young people of the nature and consequences of pandemics like COVID-19, but also to condition them of the necessary discipline and protocols.
- e) Over and above all these, all state and government efforts to put in place effective health emergency frameworks and guidelines must lead to resilience and social cohesion.
- f) With regard to all these recommendations, international bodies, other States, and civil society organizations can play an important role where national systems lack financial resources and expertise.

#### **5. Continuity and Reinforcement of Economic and Social Support Systems**

Balancing the demands of the economy with the demands of public safety and health is not an easy task. Ethical and sustainable socio-economic development is critical to enhancement of the health of all. Governments need to be able to manage effectively and ethically the tension between health and economy, with protection of the people as the primary motivation.

***Recommendation 9: States need to promote evidence-based policies to attempt to find an acceptable balance between enhanced sustainable economic activity and long-term gains in health, and the potential risks of economic activity when physical distancing cannot be maintained.***

- a) Opening spaces where people cannot adequately physically distance when infection is still very high is not only risky but also irresponsible and unethical. While people need income to survive, the State can create a mechanism of support to those whose employment was severely affected. Governments can solicit the assistance of private institutions to provide ancillary support to their employees, especially the no-work-no-pay ones.<sup>3</sup>
- b) In countries or areas where infection is low and businesses can safely open, suitable stimulus packages should be offered to small and medium enterprises severely affected by the pandemic. Such packages could include low interest rates and flexible payment schemes, for example, so as not to burden the establishments even more. On the other hand, businesses shouldn't be rescued regardless of their relaunch chances.
- c) Social support to the poor and underprivileged, refugees, senior citizens in need, the differently abled, and displaced workers and unemployed, are seen in some government's pandemic response and recovery programs, in order that those living in the peripheries of society are not left even further behind.
- d) Financial support to social entrepreneurs should be encouraged to assist displaced workers in starting their personal business enterprises.

***Recommendation 10. Governments need to ensure adequate food security.***

- a) Agriculture is an indispensable and integral part of the economy and social development. In times of pandemic and other similar disasters, especially when international trade is difficult, sufficient food security is essential to keep people alive. Agriculture is a strong and reliable support system for the economy and the society.
- b) Financial and material support to the agricultural sector is needed to increase production of food supply, including safe and unhindered transportation of products, supply of seeds and sustainable fertilizers, financial support such as loans with low interest rate and manageable payment schemes, farming equipment and machineries, and so on. Farmers and fisherfolk need to be provided protection and health services to ensure continuous supply of food.
- c) Agricultural support systems in times of pandemic should be included in the national or local action plans against pandemics. Structures and operation systems that facilitate sustainable food production during pandemics or any national health emergencies or disasters should become part and parcel of the national or local disaster response and management framework.

***Recommendation 11: Governments should transparently evaluate the impacts of all policies, both positive and negative consequences on different persons, institutions and***

---

<sup>3</sup> The WeCope subcommittee on Ethical Values and Principles for a New World Order is developing a document reviewing detailed options.



***the environment, so lessons learned can be shared internationally, to work for all the planet. Citizens should not expect perfect governments, but governments need to be able to admit mistakes and learn lessons, so that the people that they represent can make choices about the type of society that they live in.***

Members, World Emergency COVID19 Pandemic Ethics (WeCope) Committee  
[https://www.eubios.info/world\\_emergency\\_covid19\\_pandemic\\_ethics\\_committee](https://www.eubios.info/world_emergency_covid19_pandemic_ethics_committee)

Dr. Thalia Arawi (Lebanon)  
Dr. Mouna Ben Azaiz (Tunisia)  
Dr. Lian Bighorse (San Carlos Apache Nation, USA)  
Dr. Andrew Bosworth (Canada)  
Dr. Rhyddhi Chakraborty (India, UK)  
Mr. Anthony Mark Cutter (U.K.)  
Dr. Mireille D'Astous (Canada)  
Dr. Ayoub Abu Dayyeh (Jordan)  
Dr. Nilza Maria Diniz (Brazil)  
Dr. Hasan Erbay (Turkey)  
Prof. Nader Ghotbi (Japan)  
Prof. Abhik Gupta (India)  
Prof. Soraj Hongladarom (Thailand)  
Prof. Miwako Hosoda (Japan)  
Prof. Dena Hsin-Chen Hsin (Taiwan)  
Dr. Anower Hussain (Bangladesh)  
Prof. Bang-Ook Jun (Republic of Korea)  
Prof. Hassan Kaya (South Africa)  
Dr. Sumaira Khowaja-Punjwani (Pakistan)  
Prof. Julian Kinderlerer (South Africa)  
Dr. Lana Al-Shareeda Le Blanc (Iraq)  
Prof. Marlon Lofredo (the Philippines)  
Dr. Manuel Lozano Rodríguez (Spain)  
Prof. Darryl Macer (New Zealand)  
Prof. Raffaele Mantegazza (Italy)  
Dr. Aziza Menouni (Morocco)  
Dr. Endreya Marie McCabe (Delaware Nation, USA)  
Prof. Erick Valdés Meza (Chile, USA)  
Dr. Ravichandran Moorthy (Malaysia)  
Prof. Firuza Nasyrova (Tajikistan)  
Dr. Suma Parahakaran (Malaysia)  
Prof. Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (Portugal)  
Prof. Deborah Kala Perkins (USA)  
Prof. Osama Rajkhan (Saudi Arabia)  
Ms. Carmela Roybal (Tewa Nation, USA)  
Prof. Mariodoss Selvanayagam (India)  
Prof. Mihaela Serbulea (Romania)  
Dr. Jasdev Rai Singh (England)

Dr. Raquel R. Smith (USA)  
Prof. Takao Takahashi (Japan)  
Dr. Ananya Tritipthumrongchok (Thailand)  
Dr. Lakshmi Vyas (UK)  
Prof. Yanguang Wang (China)  
Prof. John Weckert (Australia)  
Dr. Anke Weisheit (Uganda)

Inquiries to: Prof. Darryl Macer, Chair, WeCope Committee; Email: [darryl@eubios.info](mailto:darryl@eubios.info) Tel. +1-949-439-9307 Printed in *EJAIB* (August 2020) Vol. 30 (6), 279-84.