

National Council on Environment and Sustainable Development

Declaration on a Sustainable and Inclusive Development

in the post-COVID19 phase

June 5, 2020

The COVID19 pandemic highlighted the difficulty for societies and economic systems to deal with critical and uncertain situations, both at the national, regional or global scale. The available prevention and response systems proved to be inadequate, resulting in penalizing consequences that are very evident in the number of human victims, in the economic impact and in the general paralysis of all societies, regardless of their degree of organization and development.

Immediate measures to reduce activities to essential minimums and concentration of resources in health systems have profoundly altered the style and living conditions of the world population. There followed a violent slowdown in global economic activity accompanied by accelerated growth in unemployment, a drastic decline in household income, increased costs in health systems, an increase in global debt and other psychosocial consequences yet to be identified and calculated with rigor.

Despite the high-intensity impact that has already been seen and that we are still living in the midst of the crisis with a high degree of uncertainty as to what the future will be, the pandemic COVID19 should also be seen as a warning for other crises, such as the loss of biodiversity, climate change, water scarcity, poverty and social inequalities. The pandemic is also an opportunity to improve preparedness in the face of this confluence of adverse situations and to adapt the current global economic and financial model to the challenges of the 21st century.

The most likely scenario in the immediate future is the increase of the frequency and diversity of similar situations, whether related to diseases or to environmental degradation in general, putting the sustainability of the planet and human societies at increasing risk.

It is therefore important, and learning from what the COVID19 crisis has already revealed to us, to adopt integrated responses that can contribute to the necessary transition to greater sustainability from a collaborative and supportive perspective, of partnerships involving organizations, societies, governments and citizens.

There is an urgent need to reorient the current global economic and financial system to defend the principles proposed by the Agenda 2030 and the respective Sustainable Development Goals, in particular relieving economic and social asymmetries and promoting the regeneration of the environment through the active cooperation of all countries.

The European Green Deal promotes a conceptual framework that, properly operationalized, could make a decisive contribution to strengthening the capacity to face crises such as COVID19, the climatic emergence and the extinction of species, generating integration and necessary synergies between sectors and policies that are still far away.

Therefore, it is essential to recognize the role of biodiversity as a pillar of sustainable development and guarantee the availability of ecosystem services, making productive systems and processes more efficient, boosting the bioeconomy and the circular economy, and protecting and recovering the natural systems.

The safeguarding of the ocean, as an essential element in the regulation and stability of the functioning of natural and socio-economic systems at different scales, from local to global, is also an immediate imperative in mitigating and adapting the effects of the different global crises.

In line with the proposal in the European Green Deal's Investment Plan - the investment plan for a sustainable Europe, it is essential to adjust the financial mechanisms within the framework for a truly sustainable economy, eliminating stimuli and support that induce significant environmental damage. In the same way, it would be important to ensure equity in terms of the European taxation, which still admits asymmetries that hinder the possibility of imputing the tax proceeds to the countries where the wealth to be taxed is actually generated. Now that the priority areas of investment for the European economic pact following the pandemic are being discussed, it is crucial to ensure that there will be funding dedicated to the decarbonisation of the economy and the enhancement of natural capital.

Energy efficiency, protection and recovery of natural capital and sustainable use of the natural resources, within a framework of innovation, supported by appropriate technologies and respecting the limits of natural and social systems and supported by compatible incentive systems, are key ingredients of future prosperity and well-being. This evolution towards a change and an increase in the efficiency of production systems must guarantee inclusion, solidarity and cooperation, in a commitment of equally global participation, leaving no one behind.

Portugal, having a unique natural capital at European level and conditions to lead an environmentally and socially fair agenda, must continue to participate and actively contribute to the proposals and initiatives in line with the desired transformation and transition to a circular and decarbonizing economy and towards a sustainable development model, reinforcing investments and promoting appropriate reforms that guarantee an effective, mobilizing and participatory governance, reinforcing the national solidarity and cohesion and international cooperation.

CNADS warns of the importance of a crosscutting and integrated participation of all ministries in the preparation of the ongoing Economic and Social Recovery Plan and calls for consideration of environmental innovation both in recovery and in the construction of a new development paradigm in post-COVID19

The professional retraining of large sectors of the active labour force is important, which will be affected by the technological transition in a society less dependent on the intensive consumption of natural, renewable and non-renewable resources, namely fossil fuels. In this context, financing lines should be created and supported by companies committed to sustainable development and technological transition, such as, for example, small and medium-sized companies creating “green jobs” in line with what is being prepared to propose the High-Level Political Forum for the Sustainable Development of the United Nations to be held next July.

CNADS stresses that the desired return to “normality”, or to the new normality, post-COVID19 should be used, finding new directions that contribute to feeding hope, not only based on words, but above all on actions, and that the current crisis does not mask the underlying environmental crisis. Overcoming them will require a real economy at the service of society and in symbiosis with the environment, supported by democratic, transparent and informed practices, and based on a sustainable economic system that generates employment and social justice.

CNADS, within the framework of its powers as a body that brings together the various sectors of civil society, will remain available to accompany, cooperate and contribute to this debate, through its role of facilitating and transferring knowledge, as well as a platform for dialogue and conciliation on environmental and sustainable development policies, both at national level and as part of its participation in the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils.

CNADS therefore commits itself to presenting soon concrete proposals for initiatives that aim to contribute to the desired transition, taking advantage of the urgent reorientations brought about by the pandemic COVID19 and its direct and indirect effects.

[Approved by email on June 5, 2020]

The President



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