

Declaration of Bogota

Latin American Social Medicine Association

The attendees of the XI Latin American Congress of Social Medicine, meeting on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Association, affirm:

In a world violated by the plunder of those resources necessary for life and the acceleration of unhealthy and unsustainable lifestyles, ALAMES reaffirms the counter-hegemonic nature of our struggle and our active opposition to capitalism and its mode of social reproduction. Capitalism is a system incompatible with the full development of a dignified, healthy, and safe life, irreconcilable with the human rights that would make such a life possible, and contrary to a harmonious and protective relationship with nature.

ALAMES is the product of many Latin American minds focused on combating the realities that undermine health. These realities include social injustice, deteriorating living conditions, the persistence of anti-democratic and authoritarian forms of leadership in our societies, and the imposition of a hegemonic culture that is individualistic, linked to consumerism, and denies our diversity and our cultural identities. ALAMES's members have multiplied and contributed greatly in the fight to meet this historic challenge, exercising their capacity to think as an important tool in the construction of a healthy life. They have worked to replace the functionalist ideology which has served as an accomplice to the structures of power and hegemony in research, education, and management.

Now, at the turn of the millennium, what has become obvious is the profound failure and destructiveness of a society based on theft and inequality with respect to the reproduction, protection, and dignity of life on the planet. A permanent state of war has become necessary to sustain this economic model of accumulation. This is a moment when ALAMES must develop its full potential as an organization where a variety of

forces – imbued with a spirit of solidarity – can come together in a movement for social emancipation, supporting our peoples and democratic governments, both national and local, in their struggles to transform the social foundations of injustice and unsustainability, with the goal of establishing societies devoted to well-being.

This is the challenge which guides our work. It can be accomplished only by taking a critical view of health, conceived of as a right whose security is closely linked to the security of other fundamental human rights. We can meet this challenge in our thoughts and actions through a radical and comprehensive rethinking of the notion of *sumak kawsay* or "to live well", looking back to the contributions and perspectives of native peoples.

This implies a scientific and social way of thinking, which draws upon the results of academic and professional activity, makes practical contributions, works in absolute independence of the powerful and mighty, is enriched by the ancient wisdom of our peoples, and stands open to the fertile influence of popular wisdom. Our thought must be integrated with the organized struggles of citizens and workers, both regionally and throughout the world, and inspired by the need to question the very foundations of life under capitalism that have hindered the construction of a society of joy, a society that allows for a full and good life and responsible liberty, a life where public decisions and public conduct are made in such a way that they contribute to the common good, and therefore to health.

Called and convened in a spirit of emancipation, we who have adopted this declaration are preparing to mobilize the full creativity and collective experiences of human freedom, our whole spirit and transformative will, to overcome the malicious and destructive processes that have

been the central model of development for our societies.

The focus of our work lies in the fight against all forms of private accumulation and dispossession which generate global climate warming and thereby place the future existence of our planet and all humanity in grave danger.

We affirm the need to strengthen the relationship of solidarity among different peoples by sustaining peace and opposing the war that has brought suffering to the peoples for the sake of capitalist accumulation. In this regard, we highlight the roles that UNASUR and ALBA must play in this effort.

As the center of our production of knowledge and our actions, we will investigate, analyze, and report on the adverse health consequences of the major commercial actors that make up both the medical-industrial complex and the financial and economic complexes represented by the international health insurance companies. These are contributors to the deterioration of the health of our peoples.

We reaffirm our determination to promote those policies, institutional structures, legal resources, and organizational forms that allow for a public and social management that is counter-hegemonic, transdisciplinary, and intercultural. Such management structures should – in their daily work and in all possible settings – promote a social democracy of gender and ethnicity which will foster those social determinants of health that work to support life.

At the same time we must direct our efforts towards the establishment of viable social security systems that include comprehensive, universal, and equitable health care systems where health care is guaranteed as a right. To accomplish this we will participate actively in democratic processes and policy discussion forums. One such forum is the First World Conference on Universal Social Security Systems to be held in March 2010 in Brasilia, Brazil.

We assume as a central responsibility the reform of undergraduate and postgraduate training, as well as the education of the general public. This education should be approached from a critical

perspective on the realities we face today and be committed to influencing social transformation processes in such a way that justice and democracy will be achieved; this would include the right to social security and health for everyone throughout the region.

We intend to promote strong ties between centers for the production of knowledge and the linkage of training of health workers with social movements, including environmental movements.

As participants in the general assembly of the XI Latin American Congress of Social Medicine and Public Health, we recognize the fruitful work of the members who have contributed over the past 25 years to advance the ongoing task of liberating thought and action, including both those present and those unable to attend. We also recognize the work of those who have left us with a legacy of their productive works.

In tribute to our members and the many accomplishments of the thousands of workers and health professionals, as well as the communities that have mobilized in defense of life, we prepare to strengthen ALAMES by bringing together the diversity of organizations representing many trends in our countries, under the unifying framework of solidarity, struggle, and counter-hegemony.

As a consequence, we denounce and condemn the following:

1. *The prospect of war:* Wars weaken the processes of democratic transformation by strengthening imperialist geopolitical control. We demand the immediate closing of U.S. military bases in Colombia and withdrawal of the U.S. Fourth Fleet stationed in Latin American Seas and the Caribbean. We support the development of a proposal to hold a referendum in Latin America against foreign military bases on the continent.

2. *The plight of social security and health in Latin America:* This makes a mockery of the rhetoric and speeches declaring health as a fundamental human right. Despite what is written in constitutions, models, health systems, policies and programs this right has not been guaranteed. We highlight as a case in point the situation in Colombia, where we see a deep crisis in access to

health services, a lack of hospitals and increasingly unsafe working conditions.

3. *All those measures adversely affecting democratic forms of government and the popular will of the people in any Latin American country:* We especially express our repudiation of the coup in Honduras and warn that it constitutes a precedent that may enhance the possibility of aggression against the governments of Paraguay, Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

4. *The unjust economic and financial embargo that has been imposed by the United States against Cuba for more than 40 years.*

5. *The free trade agreements and trade partnership agreements, mechanisms promoted mainly by the United States and the European Union:* These perpetuate power asymmetries and the economic and financial dependence of our people. These agreements deepen the privatization and plundering of our natural resources. They adversely affect guarantees of social security and increase the precariousness of labor relations for the sake of an alleged global competitiveness.

6. *The regressive tendency of policies in the areas of sexual rights, reproductive rights, and gender equity promoted by some governments, international funding agencies, and international cooperation agreements.* These policies have advanced regressive agendas of public health in Latin America. A gender perspective and that of “health partnerships” in the processes of illness and death requires fully enforceable guarantees that abortion will be decriminalized, emergency contraception made available, and sex education for men and women will take into consideration our diversity and complexity.

7. *The systematic denial of social security and health benefits suffered by countless immigrants in the countries where they work:* They and their families are denied the same social security as that enjoyed by national workers performing the same work.

We support:

1. *Workers of both genders who are exercising their right to protest for justice through direct political action and who are often*

persecuted and attacked: They sometimes lose their right to work and/or are jailed. This applies especially to health professionals who, in the performance of their medical duties, have been subjected to persecution and political violence.

2. *The 45,000 Mexican electrical workers who have lost their jobs because of the closure of the state-owned Compañía de Luz y Fuerza del Centro (Central Light & Electricity Company):* The privatization of this unique and strategic national resource was also a blow against the powerful *Sindicato Mexicano de Electricistas* (Mexican Electricians Union) and against collective bargaining in Mexico.

3. *The release of five Cuban prisoners, unjustly incarcerated in the U.S. for over 10 years.*

4. *The popular movements of Brazil, represented in the National Health Council, which oppose the creation of state foundations under commercial law, and similar cases of privatization that have occurred throughout the Region.* These foundations have been repeatedly proposed by the Brazilian government as ways of managing health services.

5. *The campaign in defense of Latin American academic freedom, specifically for those who have been called terrorists for expressing critical viewpoints:* In particular we support the Colombian Professor Miguel Angel Beltran.

6. *The role of public universities in their efforts to democratize access to higher education, and oppose privatization.*

7. *The University Hospital of San Juan de Dios de Bogotá, Colombia, in its struggle to be reopened and resume operations:* We support all public health centers that are in the same situation.

8. *The many US social movements in their struggle for reform their health care system and guarantee full access to health care not only for the entire U.S. population but also for all immigrants who live there.*

Bogota, Colombia, November 18, 2009