

THEMES AND DEBATES

Latin American Social Medicine Association: Agenda 2009 – 2011

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*What's important is not so much what you think,
rather it's what makes you think.*

- Gilles Deleuze

From the 14th to the 19th of November 2009 we spent five intense days during the Congress developing this electoral platform with the input offered by national delegations to all candidates for the General Coordinator position. The contributions made by the national delegations demonstrated their interest in the future of ALAMES. It was an intensive learning experience for us made up of conversations with delegations and participants; the challenge and effort of incorporating the various mandates given to us by the pre-Congress courses, the round table discussions, the commission, the plenary; and multiple conversations during coffee breaks and in the corridors. We have also attempted to incorporate those declarations which seemed to generate the most enthusiasm and those commentaries which we heard over and over again in our conversations. Finally, we congratulate all those who have made this Congress so productive, so moving, and so diverse; the presence of social movements has expanded the diversity and wealth of voices heard at the Congress.

We know from previous experiences that

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elections are often associated with tension. Yet elections can also serve to stimulate discussion at a Congress. In our case, the election has encouraged us to create this proposal. This is a proposal which could not have been developed prior to the Congress since it is the outcome of dialogues, expectations, and discoveries made during our conversations. We offer it to the members and institutions associated with ALAMES as a roadmap for their commentary, discussion, and criticism.

Considering:

That barely six years after the foundation of ALAMES, the "really existing" socialist block disintegrated, a historical turning point that fostered debates, political ruptures, new alliances and positions, and the appearance of new practices which have characterized a good part of our institutional history.

That Latin America, after the geopolitical change represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall, entered a decade of conservative reforms that affected all the countries of the Continent to one degree or another. This continental shift to the right emphasizes the value of the heroic resistance offered by the Cuban people and their government, as well as the laborious construction of the Brazilian National Health System which was created in spite of the coercive "recommendations" of those international financial organizations which during this period had seen their power and their ability to buy influence increase.

That the resistance to globalization from Seattle to the World Social Forum; that the political and economic crises engendered by these neoliberal policies; that the opposition to the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas); and the unparalleled appearance of new leaders and political processes in

the region have offered us a first decade of the 21st century full of events which have limited the hegemonic pretensions expressed in the NAFTA and FTAA treaties and made mockery of those who spoke of the “end of history.”

That those governments who have most strongly opposed these hegemonic pretensions remain unable - either individually or collectively - to consolidate health reforms which establish in practice the right to health and end the machinations of the for-profit sector definitively.

That the “pilot experiment” in Honduras with breaking the Constitutional order received more external support than has yet been acknowledged and serves, not simply as a regional threat, but rather as a warning to all Latin American countries.

That the countries of the continent have resolved to create UNASUR (Union of South American Nations) as a counterbalance to the discredited Organization of American States, demonstrating the possibility of regional organizations that work to the benefit of the peoples of the continent.

That in this 25th anniversary year ALAMES confronts historical circumstances vastly different from the time of its foundation.

And considering:

That a 25th anniversary offers an opportunity to reconsider the future of our organization.

That in addition to ALAMES' capacity to convoke it must also develop a solid capacity to maintain itself; this is fundamental to its institutional autonomy.

That while we are very clear that we do not want to be a non-governmental organization, we need to develop greater executive capacity, which we can define as neither more nor less than “the power to make things happen.”

That the present task is to find those mechanisms which will allow us to properly interpret the implicit and explicit mandates of the 25th Anniversary Congress and “make things happen the way they should.”

That part of the new historical context is that capitalism has developed strategies to act “from above” and escape political control, while oppositional social forces continue to wage

struggles that are almost exclusively local. This type of resistance may be effective on a small scale, but is inadequate to confront the strategies of global actors.

That the world-wide economic crisis and the contradictions arising from global capitalism's collision course with the environment present opportunities not just to denounce, but also to confront and to offer more civilized development proposals, such as those based in the wisdom of our indigenous peoples: *sumaj kawsay* or *sum qamaña* (to live well).

That we need an organizational model which allows us to strengthen our ability to bring together, to generate greater plurality with respect to identity, and to use democratic and participatory governing mechanisms based on the principle of “commanding while obeying.”

That ALAMES is a political organization with its roots in the rigorous production of knowledge, with a history of struggle, and a potential that needs not simply to be increased, but also applied on diverse fronts. These new fronts should not be seen as incompatible. They include popular organizations, social movements, student protest groups, graduate and post-graduate curricular reform, knowledge production, health systems management at the national and subnational levels, international forums, etc.

Basing ourselves on these considerations, we propose to the Assembly a strategic plan that includes at least the following 12 points:

1. *Governance:* To end the current policy of alternating genders in the post of General Coordinator and develop instead a system that would balance gender throughout ALAMES' coordinating and advisory structures.

2. *Alliances:* To develop flexible ways allowing for tactical (conjunctural) and strategic (programmatic) alliances with organizations, institutions, movements, and compatible social actors to strengthen the collective action of ALAMES at the local, national, and international levels.

3. *Training:* To expand our experience with the traveling course and develop new ways to effect educational institutions, diffuse knowledge, and

form leaders in an “administrative academy,” combining real and virtual tools in the development of educational and communication materials.

4. *Knowledge*: Democratization of knowledge. That books and other publications are fundamental tools has been shown by the experiences of ABRASCO and Editorial Fiocruz. We need to develop a cooperative publishing enterprise that will make the historical and accumulated production of the founders and partners of ALAMES available at low cost in all Latin American countries, including small towns and rural areas.

5. *Technologies*: We need to improve our use of new technologies, keeping in mind that the Internet has opened new possibilities to develop networks that are not limited by space or time; the Internet itself has become an arena of political dispute.

6. *Research*: To support research into those areas which cannot find funding because they touch upon vested interests, to network ALAMES’ partners who conduct research in compatible or complementary fields, and to facilitate the diffusion of ongoing projects and completed research.

7. *Political Affairs*: To improve the operations of the ALAMES Advisory Council as a Political Commission, especially during those political crises which will undoubtedly arise in the next three years. The council could be reinforced with additional advisors with specific expertise allowing it to make timely and considered declarations about events of concern to ALAMES members or more general political crises, such as the one in Honduras.

8. *Solidarity*: To develop ALAMES’ capacity for effective solidarity at times of crisis, like the current situation in El Salvador. We note that several beloved *compañeros* working in the Salvadorean government have not been able to attend the Congress.

9. *Networking*: To maintain the Latin American character of ALAMES between congresses: “When we are together, we are an assembly, when we are separated, we are a network.” We need to assure the persistence of a rich Latin American movement, not just once every two or three years, but continuously. The gender and occupational health networks are pioneering experiences in this regard. We need to multiply these networks and use them to transfer our

organizational expertise and knowledge from one network to another. This task has already been taken up by the gender and occupational health networks, as well as those new networks established at this congress: e.g. Interculturality from a political and human rights perspectives.

10. *Right to Health Watch*: To create a Right to Health Watch so that ALAMES members can be informed about the latest developments in this field. This would include detection of avoidable disease and death; the maneuvers of the pharmaceutical companies and transnational corporations; the more or less clever privatization schemes; the health care work force brain drain; discrimination in health care access or coverage; inequities based on gender, ethnic group, nationality, sexual preference, or social class, etc. The sharing of this information and its incorporation into local struggles will avoid the situation where “when we fight separately, we are all hung together.”

11. *ALAMES at the national Level*: To propose a model of national activities that expands our reach by facilitating the development of groups based either on geography or interest. At the same time there should be a mechanism of national coordination, methods for connecting local groups, and, ideally, a national meeting prior to the Latin American congresses. National level coordinators must be able to manage networks and maintain a good working relationship with ALAMES General Coordinators.

12. *Management*. To develop a financing mechanism – relying on national, regional, and Latin American resources – in order to make these initiatives possible while maintaining our organizational independence. This can occur through our own resources, annual membership dues, fees charged for management services on projects and programs, teaching and research, and carefully considered alliances.

We call upon the membership of ALAMES; on local, national, and international institutions; and on all those who feel affinity with our ideals to merge in a great movement to create the conditions where all Latin Americans have a right to health that is integral and enforceable. In this way we will create a Latin American people free of exclusion, privilege, and hierarchy.

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