

# *Non-Aligned Movement calls for unity and solidarity in response to Covid-19*

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By Charles McKelvey

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Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, convoked a Virtual Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, under the slogan "United against the Covid-19 Pandemic."

First, a word about Azerbaijan, a country not well known in the West. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic declared its independence in 1918, thus becoming the first modern parliamentary republic in the Muslim world. In 1920, the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic was incorporated into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Heydar Aliyev, who previously had been a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, led the people in the establishment of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1993. Aliyev was succeeded as president of the Republic by his son, Ilham Aliyev. The capital of Azerbaijan, Baku, was the location of

the First Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1920, an historic event that by the Communist International. On the basis of his observations of the political consciousness of the peoples of the East, and taking into account the failure of the proletarian revolution of Western Europe to triumph, Lenin arrived to believe that the epicenter of the global revolution would move to the oppressed and colonized peoples of the world.

The Non-Aligned Movement was and is the fulfillment of Lenin's projection. It was established in 1961 in Belgrade, Yugoslavia by twenty-three governments of Asia, the Middle East and Africa plus Cuba and Yugoslavia. Its foundational principles are sometimes called the "principals of Bandung," based on the formulations of the representatives of twenty-nine newly independent Asian and African nations in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. The Principles of Bandung include: respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; respect for the sovereignty of nations; recognition of the equality of all nations, great and small; abstention from interference in the internal affairs of other countries; respect for the right of every nation to defend itself, either alone or with the support of other states; abstaining from participation in defense agreements that favor the interests of one of the great powers; refraining from pressuring other governments; and abstention from acts of aggression and from the use of force or the threat of the use of force against any country. These principles were rooted in an experiential consciousness of the evils of a world-system in transition from colonialism to neocolonialism, and of the concepts that have to guide humanity if a more just and egalitarian world is to be created.

The Non-Aligned Movement today has 120 member governments, which comprise more than two-thirds of the member states of the United Nations, and which represent approximately 55% of the world population. It is a significant political, moral, and ideological force in the world, because of its unity with respect to principles, and because it can count on the support of China and Russia.

The Non-Aligned Movement has emitted two previous declarations in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. The first was a communique issued on March 25 that condemned the continuation of sanctions applied by the United States against Iran, Venezuela, and Cuba in the context of the global emergency resulting from the rapid propagation of Covid-19. It reaffirmed the long-standing principle of the Movement of "strong condemnation of . . . unilateral coercive measures against the member States of the Movement that violate the Charter of the United Nations and International Law."

Secondly, in the context of Trump's criticism of the World Health Organization, the Non-Aligned Movement on April 9 emitted a communique that expressed its full support for the World Health Organization and its Director General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. The document declared that "it is the moment to avoid the politicization of the virus . . . ; it is the hour of redoubling efforts of international solidarity and multilateral cooperation, in order that, together, we can assure that our common enemy, Covid-19, is defeated."

The Virtual Summit of May 4 included invited guests of international importance, including the Secretary General of the United Nations; the Director General of the World Health Organization; and Mousa Faki Mahamat, the President of the African Union Commission. In his comments to the Summit, the WHO Director General pointed out that international solidarity is vital for confronting the virus, inasmuch as it is battering the majority of countries, and no country, by itself, is able to confront the virus. The spirit of solidarity has to be at the center of our efforts to contain the disease, he declared. The President of the African Union Commission observed that Covid-19 will have significant socio-economic impact on the poorest countries, and he called for the organization of aid for medical equipment and supplies and medicines for these countries. He offered a special expression of thanks to Cuba and China for the aid that they are providing to the African continent during the pandemic.

The May 4 Virtual Summit emitted a Declaration, stating: "We reiterate our firm commitment to the purposes, principles, and dispositions of the Charter of the United Nations and the foundational documents of the Non-Aligned Movement; . . . We express profound concern for the rapid propagation of

Covid-19, which represents an enormous challenge for humanity and demands a world response on the basis of unity, solidarity, and renewed multilateral cooperation; . . . We express full support for the World Health Organization and its directors, and at the same time we recognize the fundamental role that it is playing . . . with respect to the facilitation of advice, training, providing equipment, and lending concrete services; . . . We emphasize that before this type of emergency, the spirit of solidarity ought to be in the center of our efforts, inasmuch as it demands a high level of ethical and humanist commitment in which priority is given to solidarity and selfless cooperation with the goal of providing to the peoples needed medicines, medical equipment and supplies, food, and exchange of specialized knowledge and useful procedures; . . . We express our strenuous condemnation of unilateral coercive measures against Member States of the Movement that are applied in violation of the Charter of the United Nations and international law.

The Declaration also stated that the Non-Aligned Movement has decided to establish a Task Group that will develop a data base, making known the needs and the medical and humanitarian requirements of the Member States of the Movement, which will be presented to all donating countries, international humanitarian organizations, and private transnational agencies that conduct social projects of support and assistance.

In their comments in the Virtual Summit, the Presidents of Venezuela and Cuba also put forth practical proposals. Nicolás Maduro called for the establishment by the Non-Aligned Movement of an International Humanitarian Fund that would provide “financial support for the health of the peoples;” and for the creation of a Scientific Council of Health to treat themes related to Covid-19. Miguel Díaz-Canel proposed the retaking of annual meetings of the Ministers of Health of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement, meeting in the context of the World Assembly of Health.

The Non-Aligned Movement was born in an historic movement in which the European colonial empires that extended from Asia and Asia to the Caribbean were coming to an end; and anti-imperialism in Latin America was gaining new force, as a result of the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. The Non-Aligned Movement was founded on universal moral principles, with hope for the future of humanity. It continues to stand on its foundational principles, in the face of neocolonialism, imperialism, neoliberalism, wars of aggression, and the evident amorality of the world powers.

The Non-Aligned Movement is a symbol of the enduring hope of the oppressed peoples of the world.

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