

"Shanghai Silk Road Health Forum 2020"
Amb. Carlos Larrea (07/Nov-2020)

I appreciate this invitation to be part of the "Shanghai Silk Road Health Forum 2020", co-sponsored by the Alliance of Silk Road Cities and other relevant organizations, within the framework of the China International Import Expo of this year.

For forty years, a deep friendship and a prosperous business cooperation have allowed bilateral relations between Ecuador and China to be successful and the best in history today. Its high level of relationship is through a Comprehensive Strategic Association.

Ecuador takes part of the "Belt and Road" initiative since 2018. This great project of China's economic diplomacy will undoubtedly adjust appropriately to the new regional integration initiatives in Latin America, such as PROSUR, the Pacific Alliance and others. Furthermore, Ecuador has recently become the first Latin American member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

In 2021, depending on the global health crisis of Covid_19, the 15th China-LAC Business Summit will possibly be held in Guayaquil, Ecuador, which will help the Latin American and Caribbean region to effectively insert its economic platform into the logic of China's new approach, thus as well as a well-organized connection between our private sector and the leading business decision makers in the PRC.

China is the second largest trade partner of Ecuador, and Ecuador is China's tenth trade partner in Latin America. Ecuador mainly exported crude oil, shrimps, bananas, cacao and fish meal to China, and imported machinery, automobiles and steel from China.

We want to make sure that Ecuador is ready for the 21st century, despite the complex scenario of the international economy ruled by Covid_19, which has transformed global geopolitics and requires equally global cooperation actions by the entire international community.

Indeed, already entering the topic of cooperation, today's globalized world, unfortunately, is an ideal setting for the transmission of COVID-19. The expansion of the new coronavirus pandemic is accelerating rapidly in the American continent, after having forcefully subdued almost all European countries.

The government of Ecuador was a pioneer in the region in taking restrictive measures to prevent the spread of the virus. For this reason, a health emergency, a state of emergency and a national curfew were declared.

The timely actions of the Ecuadorian government are aimed at avoiding a health and social tragedy. Unfortunately, a serious factor is added: the unprecedented economic

emergency that Ecuador is experiencing in the face of the oil price collapse, among other adverse factors.

On the other hand, Ecuador has also starred in important initiatives. I want to refer at this point to the "Global Alliance against COVID-19". The Ecuadorian president, Lenín Moreno, and other world leaders agreed on the need to promote a global alliance against the coronavirus pandemic. In this fight "we must form a true global alliance to mobilize big ideas and solidarity", reads the main statement of the article entitled "Five world leaders: this is not the time for geopolitical fights", written by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, president of Germany.

The note was co-authored with the Ecuadorian president and his colleagues from Singapore, Ethiopia, Jordan, and Costa Rica.

The Financial Times picked up this initiative, in which the authors urge the world to effectively counter COVID-19 by breaking down the barriers that impede knowledge sharing and global cooperation.

This initiative seeks to sensitize all those who can collaborate in the construction of a global response to the advance of the virus. "Shared knowledge and accelerated research led by a global network of scientists will provide (...) the final answer to our current difficulties", the authors point out and emphasize the importance of modern medicine to defeat pests through therapies and vaccines.

These elements easily articulate with China's foreign policy. The Belt and Road Initiative will undoubtedly become an strategic highway on which this new and unusual form of cooperation will flow: I am referring to health cooperation. At this point, the Project "Global Health Link" is framed in a timely and efficient manner, since it focuses on solving structural problems such as the mismatch of information on the supply and demand of medical and anti-epidemic materials, inconsistent standards, poor international logistics, and untimely interpretation of new regulations, and promote the orderly flow of medical protective materials.

Regarding the experience of Ecuador, although it was one of the first countries on the continent to take the strictest measures to contain coronavirus infections in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is one of the most affected.

Faced with limited supplies worldwide of detection kits, gloves, surgical masks, respirators, goggles and gowns, essential to prevent a wave of infections among health workers and the general population, the Ecuadorian government deployed diplomatic actions in search for international cooperation that allows it to strengthen its capacity to deal with the pandemic.

Ecuador, within the framework of the Comprehensive Strategic Association, has negotiated with Beijing, municipal governments and state companies, important donations and supplies of biosafety material that meets all the quality standards established by the Chinese government. Aid has already arrived in Ecuador and we are about to send tons of equipment that today are at the headquarters of the Embassy of Ecuador in Beijing.

The contribution of corporate giants such as Ali Baba, Baidu, Tencent, Huawei, Tik-Tok, CNPC, CDB, among others, has been significant.

Equally relevant is the transfer of scientific knowledge. Professor Li Lunjuan, a world expert on COVID-19 -and in the fight against other pandemics such as SARS and MERS- transferred her experience in Wuhan to the highest Ecuadorian health authorities, in a first initiative in Latin America that allows Ecuador fine-tune your strategies.

On June 16, the leaders of Ecuador and China had an important telephone conversation. President Xi confirmed that he will continue to firmly support Ecuador in the battle against Covid_19, will do his best to provide the necessary assistance, and will explore cooperation in areas such as research and production of vaccines and medicines.

On July 23, an important meeting took place via videoconference between the foreign ministers of CELAC and the People's Republic of China. The Ecuadorian Foreign Minister, Luis Gallegos, called for joint efforts to ensure that the vaccines for COVID-19 are classified as "a public good of global health." He also noted that equitable access and fair distribution of all essential technologies, inputs and products must be ensured to combat the virus and achieve greater support from international financial institutions to the region. Minister Wang Yi expressed his desire to contribute directly to the countries of the Latin American region and China's decision to provide one billion dollars in credits for access to vaccines and medicines. We are in talks with China to join the advanced stage research work on Covid_19 vaccines.

Success in the face of this epidemic will depend on a rigorous exercise of global co-responsibility in unconditional respect for the values of peace and cooperation. Faced with a conflict that could but should not be classified as zero sum, States, multilateral organizations and international civil society as a whole will be forced to strongly regain values such as cooperation, global solidarity, empathy, altruism, respect for truth and generosity as the only option to recover the path of development, today seriously threatened.

Ladies and gentleman.