

Current Concerns

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and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

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“Priority must be saving lives now – the universal condemnation of sanctions must follow”

Interview with Professor Dr iur. et phil. Alfred de Zayas*



Alfred de Zayas
(picture ma)

Current Concerns:
For many years you have been opposing the application of sanctions. Now it is claimed that sanctions would also make it enormously difficult to combat the corona pandemic in the countries affected

by sanctions. What do you have to say to this allegation?

Alfred de Zayas: Of course the prevailing economic war against Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Syria, Iran, North Korea, as well as the financial blockade and the asphyxiating economic sanctions contravene the UN Charter, numerous international treaties, particularly human rights treaties such as the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. They also violate the international law prohibition of interference in the internal affairs of other states, and the principle of non-intervention (which applies not only to military intervention, but also to non-conventional, hybrid warfare).

It has been shown that sanctions kill – not only unilateral coercive measures, but even ill-advised UN sanctions like those applied against Iraq 1991-2003, which led to the deaths of over a million Iraqis, deaths through malnutrition, lack of access to clean water, medicines, medical equipment etc. As early as 1995 UNICEF estimated that the sanctions had caused the deaths of some 500,000 Iraqi children – but the warning went unheard. Or worse – it was discarded by the all-powerful United States. When asked about whether it was worth maintaining the sanctions

against Iraq, in spite of the deaths of so many children, the then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright answered “yes” – as anyone can see on youtube. Still, the UN humanitarian coordinator for Iraq 1996-98, Denis Halliday, resigned in protest and called the UN sanctions “a form of genocide.” His successor Hans Christof Graf von Sponeck (1998-2000) also resigned in protest and wrote a book about it entitled “Another kind of war”.

The General Assembly has adopted 27 resolutions demanding the lifting of the US embargo against Cuba, not only because it is contrary to international law, but also because it has significantly weakened the Cuban health infrastructures and made it nearly impossible to obtain spare parts for medical equipment such as scans and dialysis machines. Professors Jeffrey Sachs and Mark Weisbrot wrote a report in 2019 estimating that the sanctions against Venezuela were responsible for the deaths of 40,000 Venezuelans in the year 2018. The situation has become worse ever since. Over the years the health infrastructures of many countries targeted by sanctions were weakened, rendering them less prepared to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. On 31 March 2020 the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Professor Hilal Elver, called for the immediate lifting of sanctions in the light of the pandemic. Other rapporteurs, like the late Idriss Jazairy, had already documented the nexus between sanctions and death. The newly appointed rapporteur on the adverse impacts of unilateral coercive measures on 2 April pleaded for the lifting of the sanctions and will probably issue a report on the matter soon – but time is of the essence!

On 1 April 2020 the government of Cuba protested against the US’ “criminal blockade”, after the US embargo blocked the delivery of Covid-19 test kits and ventilators donated by Chinese e-commerce tycoon Jack Ma, owner of Alibaba. Cuban President Diaz-Canel tweeted: “The criminal blockade of the imperial government violates the human rights of the Cuban people.” Cuba’s envoy to Beijing, Carlos Miguel Pereira, explained that a private firm was hired to deliver medical goods necessary to

fight Covid-19. However, the firm refused to deliver the shipment “at the last minute.” According to the Xinhua News Agency, the company had specifically invoked the possibility of being exposed to penalties from the UN Department of the Treasury for violating the 1995 US Helms-Burton Act.

Once again, it bears repeating, *sanctions kill*. The civil and criminal responsibility lies not only with the US but also with all States that have imposed or implemented sanctions.

To what extent is the UN advocating that sanctions be lifted?

With respect to sanctions against Cuba the General Assembly has repeatedly demanded their lifting, but the United States considers itself above international law and has imposed illegal sanctions against Cuba for six decades. Unless there are consequences for the American economy, this is not likely to change. But, of course, other countries like Canada, UK, etc. also impose sanctions or implement the US sanctions against Cuba, Venezuela, Iran, etc. with regard to the extra-territorial application of US law and the imposition of penalties for “violating the sanctions”. The civil and criminal responsibility for imposing or implementing sanctions lies primarily with the US, but also with all States that have imposed or implemented sanctions and even with private corporations that put profit above human life.

What is the position of the international community on this issue? How do you assess the International Solidarity Report in this context?

The “international community” is not acting in a manner consistent with the UN Charter and the obligation to practice international solidarity. Back in 2017 the UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity, Virginia Dandan, issued a *Draft Declaration on the Right to International Solidarity*, which, however, the General Assembly never adopted. It is time that the Secretary General remind the Security Council,

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“Priority must be saving lives ...”

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the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council of their respective responsibilities and to advocate the formal adoption of the Declaration – and its concrete implementation.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, on 24 March called for sanctions to be eased in order to combat the pandemic and thus limit its global spread. How promising are her demands? The High Commissioner should have condemned the sanctions because of their direct violations of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of the populations targeted. Already Bachelet's predecessor as High Commissioner *Navi Pillay* condemned unilateral coercive measures and called for their termination in her 2012 Report A/19/33. Easing the sanctions is not enough. They must be condemned as crimes against humanity. There is no possible legal or moral compromise here. Sanctions violate human rights. Sanctions kill. Bachelet should have called for the complete lifting of sanctions and for the payment of reparations and compensation to the victims. If the Secretary General of the United Nations were to endorse

Bachelet's demands and refer the matter to the General Assembly as a matter of urgency, maybe the demands will be met. Of course, there is the problem of “image” – a fear of “losing face”. The United States, Canada, the European Union do not like losing face. They auto-define themselves as “the good guys”. How could they be in the wrong by imposing sanctions? This requires a paradigm shift, a recognition of the fact that even “the good guys” have committed and are committing crimes against humanity such as slavery, the slave trade, colonialism, apartheid, etc. Here lies a major obstacle to lifting the sanctions – a culture of “exceptionalism”. At the same time, there is no denying that many in the US, Canada and the EU do recognise that sanctions are illegal and criminal, but they also know that it is difficult to stop a moving train, and thus US, UK and European leaders have developed a kind of internal solidarity – the same kind of solidarity that criminal cartels like the Mafia observe among themselves. And yet what is needed is a recognition that in the modern world “unilateralism” is no longer acceptable. That in the light of the pandemic, only international solidarity and cooperation among States can slow down and eventually defeat the common enemy.

With regard to the pandemic: would lifting the sanctions on medicines and medical equipment be sufficient as a first step? What is the overall importance of sanctions for a country affected by the pandemic?

It is a necessary first step. But International Solidarity also requires that countries whose health infrastructures have been sabotaged by sanctions be given external assistance. However, genuine humanitarian assistance must be unpolitical, with no strings attached and not part of ulterior geopolitical strategies of “regime change”. Priority must be to prevent further contagion and to give prompt medical assistance including with respirators to those who have contracted the disease. Priority must be saving lives now – the universal condemnation of sanctions and of the countries imposing them must follow.

What role can Switzerland play in lifting the sanctions?

“Calamitas virtutis occasio” (*Seneca*, De Providentia, 4,6, Calamity is an opportunity to prove one's courage.) A calamity gives the opportunity to demonstrate virtue, solidarity, ethics. Switzerland has a tradition of neutrality and considerable experience in mediation. Surely Switzerland could

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UN rights expert urges Governments to save lives by lifting all economic sanctions amid COVID-19 pandemic

A UN human rights expert on 3 April 2020 called for the lifting of all unilateral sanctions that obstruct the humanitarian responses of sanctioned States, in order to enable their health care systems to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and save lives.

“I urge the international community to take immediate measures to lift, or at least suspend, all sanctions until our common threat is eliminated,” said Ms. Alena Douhan¹, the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights. This aligns with the recent appeal of the UN Secretary-General to wave sanctions that undermine countries' capacity to respond to the pandemic.

“The defeat of this enemy can only be achieved through joint efforts of all States and international organisations in a spirit of multilateralism, cooperation and solidarity,” she said. “In the face of the global challenge, no one shall be denied vital medical care.”

“I call on all Governments that use sanctions as foreign-relation tools to immediately withdraw measures aimed at establishing trade barriers, and ban tariffs, quotas, non-tariff measures, including those which prevent financing the

purchase of medicine, medical equipment, food, other essential goods,” said the UN expert.

The Special Rapporteur stressed that the current pandemic is challenging the whole system of human rights, including such fundamental rights as the right to life and right to health. “A sensitive human-rights approach is needed to confront the COVID-19 crisis, and that includes the lifting of any coercive measures among States,” she said.

“I welcome all efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the countries affected by the disease.” Douhan noted that some Governments and international organisations are often unable to provide the even most basic aid to the population of the sanctioned countries because unilateral sanctions use the global financial system to force third countries, companies and financial institutions to avoid any transactions related to those States.

“This is a matter of utmost importance and great urgency. The COVID-19 virus does not choose. It crosses borders easily and targets people regardless of nationality, race, political approaches, religion or social status,” she said, noting that in sanctioned countries, in particular Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Syria and Yemen, medical equipment is rather

often outdated, and suffer shortages of medicine and protective means.

“Sanctioned countries are especially hard-hit as they cannot use their revenues to purchase imports of equipment, medicines, antiviral and food from global markets,” the UN expert said. “The pandemic is triggering a serious economic crisis with serious negative humanitarian effects, especially for the most vulnerable ones in the poorest sectors of the population: women, elderly, youth, and children,” Douhan said.

“I reiterate my predecessor's long standing position that the use of economic sanctions for political purposes violates human rights and the norms of international behaviour. As earlier as May 2019, he warned that such actions may precipitate man-made humanitarian catastrophes of unprecedented proportions.

“This is what we are witnessing now with regard to the health system worldwide and in sanctioned countries in particular.”

¹ Ms Alena Douhan (Belarus) was appointed as Special Rapporteur on the negative impact of the unilateral coercive measures on the enjoyment of human rights by the Human Rights Council in March 2020.

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take the lead in publicly calling for a lifting of sanctions and offering its good offices to reach peaceful solutions between countries imposing sanctions and countries suffering them. Switzerland has a good reputation as an honest broker and it should discretely approach the government of the United States and try to broker deals with the governments of Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Iran, Syria, North Korea etc. – deals based on the United Nations Charter and international law.

What do you consider to be the most important thing now?

The post-pandemic world should be a world of international solidarity – without unilateral coercive measures. This is the moment for the international community to reaffirm the principles of multilateralism contained in the UN Charter and demand that unilateral coercive measures that cause death and suffering be condemned by the *International Criminal Court* as a crime against humanity. An investigation before the ICC is currently being conducted, after the Foreign Minis-

ter of Venezuela, *Jorge Arreaza*, submitted the Venezuelan case to the ICC Prosecutor *Fatou Bensouda* on 13 February 2020, pursuant to article 14 of the ICC statute. Arreaza announced this in his speech to the UN Human Rights Council on 24 February 2020. I was there when Arreaza also referred to my UN report *A/HRC/39/47/Add.1*. I am convinced that the US sanctions against Venezuela do constitute a “crime against humanity” under article 7 of the ICC statute.

In the meantime it would be important to obtain precise, empirical evidence concerning the nexus between sanctions and death, between sanctions and Covid-19. The *World Health Organization* could establish a working group to study the matter and issue a report as a matter of urgency. *UNICEF* could make an estimate of the number of children who have died as a consequence of sanctions, and the number of persons likely to die as a consequence of the inability of States to cope with the pandemic. The *UN Food and Agriculture Organisation* should similarly establish a study concerning the adverse impact of sanctions on the agriculture and nutrition of targeted countries.

It is time for the General Assembly to adopt a resolution pursuant to Article 96 of the UN Charter, elevating the legal issues to the International Court of Justice, demanding as a matter of urgency an Advisory Opinion on

1. The illegality of unilateral coercive measures
2. The violations of the international human rights treaty regime, including ICCPR, ICESCR and CRC
3. The consequences of maintaining sanctions regimes
4. The civil and penal liability of States and politicians directly involved in the imposition and implementation of the sanctions.

It's quite clear that when sanctions are imposed on a country that the population is going to suffer. It's ridiculous to pretend that the sanctions are only going to affect the government elite. In fact, the government elites usually continue living rather well. It's the most vulnerable – women, children – who have to pay for the consequences of these illegal sanctions.

Professor de Zayas, thank you very much for the interview. •

US economists on US sanctions: fruitless, heartless and illegal

ev. In view of the coronavirus crisis, various countries demanded an end to the unilateral sanctions imposed by the US. Even in the US itself, voices are calling for an immediate end to such measures, especially in view of the global coronavirus crisis. So say US economists in a case study on Venezuela, one of the editors also in an interview that Amy Goodman has conducted on Democracy Now with *Jeffrey Sachs* and the Venezuelan *Miguel Tinker Salas*, professor at Pomona College in California. Although the demands for the lifting of sanctions were once again emphatically raised on the occasion of the Corona crisis, the statements on this were of much more fundamental importance.

Today, the US economist *Jeffrey Sachs* deals with health policy, sustainable development and he demands debt relief for extremely poor states. However, he is best known for his neo-liberal economic concepts, for example his recommendations for privatisation and liberalisation in the style of a shock therapy, as a result of which countless companies in various countries, especially in Eastern Europe, went bankrupt. This makes it all the more interesting that there are also calls from such sides for the immediate lifting

of unilateral coercive measures - the unilateral US sanctions – against countries such as Iran, Syria, Venezuela or Cuba.

In a report by the Centre for Economic and Policy Research, edited by *Jeffrey Sachs* and *Mark Weisbrot* entitled “Economic Sanctions as Collective Punishment: The Case of Venezuela,” they examine the consequences of US sanctions on food availability and pharmaceuticals in Venezuela and how it increased disease and mortality. Literally the report writes: “American sanctions are deliberately aiming to wreck Venezuela's economy and thereby lead to regime change. It's a fruitless, heartless, illegal, and failed policy, causing grave harm to the Venezuelan people.”

In the interview conducted on the occasion of the publication of the report, *Jeffrey Sachs* comments on the figures they quoted – including 40,000 fatalities due to the sanctions: “I don't want anyone to think that there is precision in these numbers. What is certain, though, staring us in the face, is that there is a humanitarian catastrophe, deliberately caused by the United States, by what I would say are illegal sanctions, because they are deliberately trying to bring down a government and trying to create

chaos for the purpose of an overthrow of a government.”

After all, regardless of any mistakes a government may have made, as *Sachs* continued, it was the sanctions that “pushed Venezuela into this catastrophic, spiraling decline and hyperinflation. It's always blamed in our press on *Maduro*, but people don't even look and understand how the US has the instruments of sanctions blocking access to financial markets, pushing enterprises into default, blocking trade, confiscating the assets owned by the Venezuelan government, precisely to and with the design of creating this kind of crisis, because the idea is, if the pain is enough in the thinking of people like *Bolton* then there will be a military overthrow. So they're trying to create absolute disaster.”

It would be high time that all states finally put an end to these measures that are contrary to international law and a mockery of all humanity and put an end to their hostage-taking as a result of such illegal actions.

Source: www.democracynow.org, https://www.democracynow.org/2019/5/1/economist_jeffrey_sachs_us_sanctions_have
(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Sanctions cause considerable disruption to health care

Countries like Syria and Iran are fighting the corona virus on two fronts

by Karin Leukefeld



Karin Leukefeld
(picture ma)

International and private aid organisations promise to help the weakest of the weak and compete on the international donations market. In view of the major challenges, the Secretary-General of the United Nations is calling for a global ceasefire. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights calls for an easing of sanctions against countries that are heavily struggling with the infectious disease COVID-19.

In a joint letter to the UN Secretary-General *António Guterres*, the UN ambassadors of Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, Syria, Venezuela and Nicaragua called for the immediate lifting of economic sanctions against their countries: the whole world being affected by the disease, all countries must have the same opportunities to fight the disease and cooperate with each other.

Iran, having suffered from US sanctions since 1979, is particularly affected. With the US withdrawal from the joint nuclear agreement at the beginning of 2018, US President *Donald Trump* exacerbated the situation. Agreed relaxation of the sanctions did not come into force. Instead, Trump announced that he would “reduce Iran’s oil exports to zero”. According to the US administration, far-reaching financial sanctions, which came into force at the end of 2019, are also to isolate Iran economically.

According to the Ministry of Health in Tehran on 25 March 2020, 2,077 people died of the infectious disease, including 50 doctors. More than 27,000 people are infected with the disease. The World Health Organization (WHO) sent 7.5 tons of medical supplies, including tests and protective clothing for doctors and medical staff.

Syria and Lebanon also suffer from US sanctions. The economies of both countries are closely interlinked, and the economic and financial pressure of US and EU sanctions against Syria – applying in particular to the US dollar and other foreign currency reserves – is also affecting Lebanon.

In Lebanon, the first cases of illness were registered at the beginning of March, and on 15 March the state of emergency and a curfew were imposed. Schools and universities, restaurants and cafés, ports, borders and the country’s only airport were closed. On 25 March 2020, the number of illnesses was reported by the Ministry of Health at 333, six people have died so far. On Thursday, the Lebanese Defence Council, chaired by President *Michel Aoun*, extended the curfew for another 14 days until 12 April 2020.

Since 2011, in addition to US sanctions, Syria has been subject to a long list of economic sanctions imposed by the European Council. Due to nine years of war and the displacement of millions of people, living conditions are precarious. The health system has been operating at the limit for years and the country lacks well-trained medical personnel. Around 70,000 doctors and specialists have left the country.

Since mid-March, schools and universities, kindergartens, restaurants and cafés have been closed. A night curfew from 6:00pm to 6:00am has been imposed on the population in all provinces of the country. The borders with the neighbouring countries Jordan and Lebanon have been closed, and private and state transport has been suspended, except for essential goods. According to the Ministry of Health, there are five confirmed infections with the coronavirus. In Zabadani, a special hospital has been opened for emergencies, and a quarantine centre is in place at Al Dweir outside Damascus.

In the areas in the north and east of the country that are not controlled by the Syrian government, the “White Helmets” or the Kurdish-led “Syrian Democratic Forces” take care of the health situation. They receive support from the World Health Organization.

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Corona in Russia – two reports from the country

cc. The corona pandemic has spared no country. Russia is also affected. In many of our media the idea of Russia as bogeyman has unfortunately not yet been corrected. Two reports from Germans living in Russia may help to correct some prejudices. The two eyewitness reports are from March 17 and March 20. In the meantime, the situation in Russia has also deteriorated and the Russian government and the responsible regional and local authorities have taken further measures, which are very similar to those in our countries today.

Nizhny Novgorod

I, *Siegfried Wilhelm*, have been living in Russia for more than ten years and carefully keep up with what is happening.

At the beginning of January of this year, news broadcasts on Russian television spoke of a novel possible virus epidemic that originated in Wuhan. Immediately afterwards, controls were set up at the border crossings. Every traveller from the Wuhan region, later from China in general, was tested with thermal cameras and if suspected, i.e. at elevated body temperature, was committed into an isolation ward.

Transition points were closed and air traffic with China was completely shut down within a week. Isolation rooms have been established at the airports; travellers suspected of being infected have been committed to hospitals for infectious diseases. Some of them still had to be established, for example in sanatoria and similar institutions, among others in the Tyumen region.

The corona news occupy about 75 % of the news broadcasts on Russian TV stations. Anyone who is serious only takes to the streets wearing a mask, although these masks have now become rare. In January, Russia had sent one million masks to China as emergency aid. That was only the famous drop in the ocean, but still.

During this time, I particularly noticed that public transport and public facilities such as metro stations were treated with disinfectant. Specifically, the news showed how handrails were disinfected in the Moscow metro. This seemed unusual to me. According to the news, it should have happened also on busses etc. However, I cannot confirm it, because I did not see it myself.

Otherwise, measures against the spread of the virus are a regional matter. The governors of the single oblasts or heads of government of the republics have to decide locally what to do. On 16 March 2020, it was reported on television that a team of experts has been established with the government, including medical spe-



On Wednesday, 1 April 2020, the Russian Antonov AN 124-100 (RA-82038) landed at JFK airport in New York with medical supplies for the USA. The New York Air Traffic Controller thanked the Russian pilot, "Romeo Foxtrot Foxtrot 8460. Heavy, we sincerely thank you for all the assistance you are bringing in," the controller said. "Have a good day." (pictures Russian Air force)

Russia sends coronavirus aid to the US

Russia sends medical supplies to combat the corona pandemic in the US. According to the news agency Interfax, Kremlin spokesman *Dmitry Peskov* said that President *Vladimir Putin* offered the help with regards to the terrible situation in the US. *Donald Trump* accepted it. A plane with medical supplies should

take-off the very same day. For the second time during the corona crisis, Russia supported a country which is a member of NATO. Earlier it sent medical and personnel assistance to Italy.

Source: <https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/panorama/ticker-corona-virus-dienstagei-nunddreissigster-maerz-100.html> from 31 March 2020

cialists, federal and regional representatives of healthcare, and other professionals. Several regions where infections have occurred have been declared as priority areas, including Nizhny Novgorod because of a case "imported" from Italy. It's better to do too much than to little. The success proves this policy right. Here in Nizhny Novgorod there are now only two cases of infection, one came back from Italy, one from Germany.

In total, there were as many as two dozen infected persons in Russia over a period of

several weeks. This week there was a huge increase, so that currently 219 people are affected, one death so far (as of 17 March 2020). The increase in the number of infected persons has concrete causes. It still affects returnees from abroad, primarily holidaymakers from Austria, especially Tyrol, or from other Alpine regions, especially Courchevel – the winter sports paradise of those who do not belong to the underclass. The returnees are requested to stay at home

"Corona in Russia ..."

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in quarantine for 14 days, which is generally observed, with exceptions.

There are no supply bottlenecks – despite some prophecies of doom

I am not able to say to what extent military medical personnel are involved in the actions against the virus, as indicated by acquaintances. It is impossible by no means, but this has to be decided always on the spot. Anyone who now travels to Moscow from China or the countries of the EU and Scandinavia, including Switzerland, (this can only be done via Sheremetyevo Airport, rail traffic has been ceased) must first be in quarantine for two weeks, which can also happen at home if necessary. Schools and universities are closed until 12 April. Kindergartens are working at reduced capacity. Only children of people working in social priority areas (medical sector, nursing staff, and bus/tram drivers) will be admitted. Shops are normally open and normally stocked.

*Siegfried Wilhelm, Nizhny Novgorod,
March 20, 2020*

St. Petersburg

In Russia, life is still largely going its usual course. Although theatres are closed, concerts and sporting events cancelled and gatherings of more than 50 people are forbidden, apart from that, you hardly notice the virus in everyday life in Russia. With almost 200,000 tests carried out, Russia has only just under 650 infections. This is mainly due to the fact that Russia has reacted very quickly and, among other things, has closed its borders. Russians returning home from abroad (Russia has brought home over 40,000 Russians from abroad in the last ten days by special flights) have to spend two weeks in domestic quarantine.

But now the number of infected people is rising faster and faster, also in Russia. Yesterday the number was under 500, today it is already over 650. As a reminder: When Germany had this number of infected people at the beginning of March, there were practically no measures taken by the German government. By the way, Russia also reported the first two deaths from the coronavirus today.

Today President *Putin* addressed the Russians in a television speech and announced the measures that will apply in

Russia as of Saturday, 28 March 2020. These measures include postponing indefinitely the referendum on the planned constitutional reform, which was to take place at the end of April.

From Saturday onwards, work in Russia will be largely suspended, rules will apply as on holidays, which means that people will not go to work, but salaries will continue to be paid. However, shops, banks, insurance companies, public authorities and public transport will continue to work.

The regulation will apply from 28 March to 5 April 2020, but I expect it to be extended or even tightened up by then, depending on how new infections develop.

Putin also has no illusions that Russia will be spared by the epidemic. He said it very clearly: "The work-free days have been decided with the aim of slowing down the spread of the disease."

In Russia, too, one is aware of the fact that there is no way to stop the disease, but at best to delay its spread. By the way, it is remarkable that I have not yet seen empty shelves in the shops in Russia. There are corresponding videos from Russia, but I went shopping yesterday, and at least in my supermarket around the corner everything was there, the shelves were full.

In his speech, Putin announced a programme to support people and the economy. All social benefits that people receive are to be extended by six months in a lump sum, without the usual applications or documents having to be presented. In addition, a kind of special child benefit of 5,000 roubles (about 60 euros) per month will be paid for three months. And also the increase in family support announced by Putin in January, which was to be paid out from July, will now be brought forward by one month and paid out from June. Since these funds are paid retroactively from January, families with children will receive a quite respectable sum in June.

In addition, the sick pay is now to be calculated differently and increased. In Russia, sick pay is calculated using a formula that takes into account the amount of the salary and the years of employment, which means that sick pay for young people is often very low. This should now be increased and may no longer be below the minimum wage. The unemployment benefit will also be increased by half, because these days people are losing their jobs in Russia as well and it is of course almost

impossible to find a new job, at least for the moment.

There will also be help with loans. If a person's income falls by 30% or more, the banks will be instructed to defer the instalments for loans. This applies to all types of personal loans, whether consumer loans or mortgages.

Small and medium-sized enterprises do not have to pay taxes other than value-added taxes for six months. The same applies to social security contributions, which in Russia – unlike in Germany – are paid solely by the employer. In addition, social security contributions will be cut in half across the board; previously they were 30%, but now they are only 15%. This measure is valid indefinitely. In order to prevent companies from going bankrupt because of the crisis, no outstanding debts will be allowed to be legally collected for six months.

But Russia is also using the situation to raise other taxes. This involves funds that flow out of Russia in the form of dividends and profit distributions. Up to now, only two percent tax has been due on these. In Russia, the income tax is a flat rate of 13%, so from now on a 15% tax will be due on profits transferred abroad. However, in many cases this affects double taxation agreements with other countries. Putin said: "If our foreign partners do not accept our proposals in this regard, we will withdraw from the double taxation agreements with these countries."

On the second new tax, Putin said: "In many countries of the world, interest income earned by individuals from bank deposits and securities is subject to income tax. We do not tax such income. I propose to set a tax on interest income at 13% for citizens whose total volume of bank deposits or investments in debt securities exceeds one million roubles (about 12,500 euros). That is, I repeat, not the contribution itself, but only the interest earned from such investments will be taxed on the income of individuals." The additional income from these measures will be used to counter-finance social security contributions.

*Thomas Röper, St. Petersburg,
25 March 2020*

Source of the second text: <https://www.anti-spiegel.ru/2020/fernsehansprache-von-putin-zum-coronavirus-welche-massnahmen-die-russische-regierung-ergreift/> from 25 March 2020

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

Safe digital environment in times of eLearning at home for children under the age of 18 years

A Russian perspective

*In co-operation with the Russian committee for the protection from non-ionising radiation the Scientific research centre for children's health at the Russian ministry of health has published recommendations for the use of digital media during the school shutdown**

The guidelines for the home lessons during restrictions of school hours are meant for children and their parents, grandparents and all who help children with eLearning during this time of necessary limitations for schools and other educational institutions.

1. Children under the age of 18 years doing eLearning at home should preferably use personal computers and notebooks with wired connections to the internet. For workstations with wireless WiFi the distance between the router and the computer should be at least 5 metres.
2. The computer keyboard should be cleaned and disinfected with an antiseptic agent each day before starting to work. The screen should be cleaned and disinfected in the same way.
3. Prior to using the keyboard both the child and the assisting adults should wash their hands.
4. In order to minimise the risk of visual disturbances and strains of the musculoskeletal system it is required to set up the workstation in a way convenient for the child to work at the computer or laptop (the height of table and chair need to correspond to the sitting height of the child). The screen brightness needs to be properly adjusted.
5. The main light source for the workstation of the child should be sideways from the screen (neither behind

the screen nor behind the person working at the computer). The brightness of the light source should be equal to the screen brightness.

6. Tablets may be used for eLearning by teenagers above the age of 15 years. Wash your hands before using the tablet and wipe the screen with a disinfectant (wet towel). The WiFi router needs to be more than 5 metres away from the workstation of the pupil. The tablet should be placed on a tablet stand in an angle of 30cm, the distance between the screen and the eyes of the pupil needs to be at least 50cm. Neither should laptops or tablets be placed on the lap or held in the hands nor should they be used in a lying position.
7. For all age groups younger than 18 years it is necessary to refrain from using smartphones for eLearning (reading, information gathering).
8. It is recommended for all age groups to primarily use printed books for reading and jotters or pocketbooks to take notes.
9. Children younger than six years should not use computer equipment at all for learning purposes at home.
10. It is recommended to minimise the use of computers for learning purposes at home for children between 6 and 12 years of age. If unavoidable, the cumulative time spent in front of a screen (including television) should not exceed two hours per day for children of this age group. The time regimen should follow the rule "one to three" (30 minutes rest for 10 minutes computer work) for children between 6 and 8 years of age, and "one to two" (20 minutes rest for 10 minutes computer work) for those between 8 to 12.

11. For children between 12 to 18 years of age computers should be used as follows: "one to two" for children between 12 to 15 years (60 minutes rest for 30 minutes computer work) and "one to one" for children between 15 to 18 years (45 minutes rest for 45 minutes computer work). Cumulative time spent in front of a screen including television should not exceed 3,5 to 4 hours per day in children of this age group.
12. To avoid visual exhaustion, it is necessary to do eye exercises in the rest phases; to prevent general exhaustion light work-up (knee-bends, push-ups etc) should be performed.
13. Headphones should not be used longer than one hour continuously and not louder than 60%.
14. The room where the eLearning takes place needs to be aired before the session for at least 15 minutes and after each hour.
15. Don't use tablets or smartphones for eLearning in open air (in parks, playgrounds or similar places). •

* These recommendations were developed based on data from the programme of multi-center research about safe digital educational tools for children, on materials of the National Research Institute for Children's Health and "NICH Children's Health" and of the "Russian National Committee for the Protection against non-ionising radiation", also using recommendations of the World Health Organization and best practice guidelines from around the world regarding hygiene of digital education environments for children.

Russian sources: <http://www.emf-net.ru/index.php?id=210>; <https://niigd.ru/news/bezopasnost-cifrovoj-sredy-v-usloviyah-distancionnogo-obucheniya-detej-do-18-let.html> translation from Russian into German by <https://www.diagnosefunk.org/publikationen/artikel/detail&newsid=1544>; (Translation Current Concerns)

Mutual help – indispensable in an emergency situation

by Kathrin and Dr Peter Küpfer P.

The Corona pandemic has activated fundamental positive human traits. In the face of this emergency, examples of people helping each other are accumulating.

Guaranteeing solidarity for all

Withholding medical treatment from a certain age group is not congruent with this upsurge in human solidarity in times of threat. According to newspaper reports in the last few days, this selective medical treatment was probably caused by the extreme emergency situation in a regional hospital in France, which was stretched to the limit by the crisis. As of 21 March, seriously ill patients with COVID-19 over 80 years of age are not to be ventilated, but are to receive palliative care. According to the reports, the responsible ethics committee approved this procedure. The *German Foundation for Patient Protection* sharply criticised the age criterion of this procedure. Age or origin should not play a role in medical care, said board member *Eugen Brysch*.¹

In principle, laws and orders issued by the government of a democratic state must always be measured against the government main task: to guarantee its citizens a life in freedom, security and human dignity. To all citizens, without exception. The right for unrestricted health care is for all, just as the right for education and the basic services such as water supply, electricity and public transport. In democracy, the principle of solidarity is alive and well, even in the face of adversity, otherwise real democracy would be in poor shape. Therefore democracy means that each case must be treated individually and in a humane way. “In the knowledge that the strength of a people is measured by the well-being of its weakest members”. That was the title of *Erika Vögeli*'s editorial in the last issue of *Current Concerns*. Therein she rightly recalled the spirit that underlies our constitution.

Making it a principle in Switzerland only to guarantee limited medical care, especially for the elderly, would be contrary to this spirit. People who today are 80 or older, experienced the time of privation as children during the Second World War and have subsequently recreated the prosperity of our country and have supported and consolidated it during the years of economic boom. Most of them worked hard and lived a modest life. They supported the state i.e. by paying their taxes regularly. It would be unacceptable to treat them as “drones” of and as a “burden” to our economic system. This generation does not to be reminded to act with solidarity. Soli-



A 101-year-old woman infected with the coronavirus has recovered and will soon be discharged from hospital. “She is a brave woman,” describes a lung specialist at the hospital. He said it was wonderful to see “how she follows the rules of life”. She cleans her elbow and insists that her visits stay at a reasonable distance from her. (picture ma)

arity was conveyed to them through education, parenting and lifestyle. That is why particularly our older fellow citizens have a right to solidarity. They have often rightly reminded us to live more carefully and more modestly. The African proverb is also justified here: “When an old person dies, a library dies.”

We must all stand in solidarity. The President of the Swiss Confederation *Simonetta Sommaruga* recently strongly demanded the “jolt of reflection” from all Swiss people. This must also shape the spirit of the decrees issued by those responsible. Solidarity does not mean obeying orders only, it means much more.

Beat Richner’s hospitals – a valuable model

The Swiss doctor *Beat Richner*, who was buried last year with all honours, showed in distant Cambodia what is possible for a single person through his lifelong commitment. His example has inspired many. With simple means and the involvement of relatives he saved lives and guaranteed care at a high human and medical level. In doing so, he placed Cambodian children scarred by the war and its disastrous post-war health effects at the centre of his efforts. Amongst others, he tried in vain to obtain urgently needed medicines at a discount price from well-known pharmaceutical companies. He did not want to make a profit with his hospitals, but simply help. Richner then turned to the solidarity of the Swiss people and was suc-

cessful for many years. Part of his success was also that Beat Richner did not separate his patients. Families stayed together, lived with their sick relatives, mostly children, cooked for them, spent a lot of time with them and helped with the treatment whenever possible.

The importance of compassion

We are not in Cambodia and our health threat is not a consequence of war. But the knowledge that a sick person needs above all compassion and human company – not only specialists and equipment – also applies to us. The sick person is a fellow human being, and in many cases the patient can contribute much more to his health or recovery than we think. Even in the case of the current threat, too few opportunities are being realised.

People are thinking creatively. In a serious car accident, you revive and ventilate the victim if necessary. This was done even in the days of HIV infection – first responders were correspondingly careful. People who are ill need one thing above all, that is human sympathy. Last will and testamentary dispositions to renounce this or that therapy do not create confidence. It is medical encouragement that breathing will become easier again and that the crisis can be overcome. Mechanical intervention is an anonymous makeshift and of great importance in hospitals. But the energy for recovery arises from the soli-

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“When it comes right down to it, you sit together and solve the problems”

Unbureaucratic and rapid support for businesses and workers

by Dr iur. Marianne Wüthrich

There is the state of emergency – in Switzerland as in many other countries. The protection of the population and the maintenance of the functioning of the hospitals naturally have top priority. But it is also the duty of the state to do everything humanly possible to ensure that the businesses can keep afloat today and recover later, that jobs are saved and that the unemployed are supported until they can return to work again. The Federal Council is also tackling this demanding task with remarkable vigour.

We pensioners must be aware that we are privileged. AHV (Old-age insurance system OASI) and pension fund pensions are secure, as was recently reported on the radio news. The situation is different for our fellow citizens who are in gainful employment. The Federal Council, in cooperation with many offices and institutions in the country, is paying particular attention to them today. It is impressive how quickly and unbureaucratically government action is possible in Switzerland when it really matters. The new emergency measures in the economic field are summarised here.

On 20 March 2020, the Federal Council approved a comprehensive package of measures totalling CHF 32 billion to cushion the economic consequences of the corona pandemic. Together with the measures already decided on 13 March, a total of over CHF 40 billion is thus available. The necessary decisions to implement the package quickly and easily were already taken on 25 March. You can read

“Mutual help – indispensable ...”

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identity and the confidence that we are being helped for the sake of our humanity. Whether death occurs is not something we humans should, may or want to decide. It is not our task, thank God. A patient remains a relative, friend, neighbour, co-worker and fellow citizen. If we learn to intensify this principle, even simpler means of help will be a relief for everyone. The main thing is that we help! The corona crisis makes us aware of it in many details. This is an opportunity for us all. •

¹ Report from Alsace: patients over 80 are no longer ventilated; in: *Tages-Anzeiger*, Corona-Ticker-International, 3-26-2020 (www.tagesanzeiger/corona-ticker-international)

Swiss Parliament wants to have a say Special session from 4 to 8 May 2020 at the “Bernexpo”

The National Council and the Council of States ended their spring session prematurely after two weeks because it would have been too risky to hold the third week (from 16 March) in the closely seated council chambers. The summer session will only take place from 2 to 19 June.

In order to enable the Parliament to make its constitutional contribution to overcoming the crisis, 28 members of the Council of States (out of 46) requested an extraordinary session on 25 March. According to *Andrea Caroni* (FDP, AR), a member of the Council of States, this is not a sign of distrust towards the Federal Council: “Perhaps the Parliament will also come to the conclusion that it does not need any other measures than those taken by the Federal Council.”¹ The Federal Council has also requested an extraordinary session.

This will now take place from 4 to 8 May, but not in the Parliament Building, but at the “Bernexpo”, the trade fair and exhibition site in Bern. The media release of 26 March states: “The location of the Bernexpo will allow the Federal Office of Public Health’s rules of conduct and hygiene to be observed during the Council debates”. Parliament will discuss the subsequent approval of the supplementary credits decided by the Federal Council and possibly decide on further measures.²

¹ Fluri, Lucien. “Ständeräte beantragen ausserordentliche Parlamentssession” (Councillor of States requests extraordinary session of Parliament). In: *St. Galler Tagblatt* from 26 March 2020

² “Corona-Krise: Das Parlament tagt Anfang Mai in der Bernexpo.” (Coronavirus crisis: Parliament meets at Bernexpo in early May.) Press release of the Parliament from 23 March 2020 (Translation *Current Concerns*)

Federal Councillor *Ueli Maurer*’s statement below. Here are the most important innovations:

Deferral of payments and credits for companies: fascinating speed

The companies concerned may be granted a temporary interest-free deferral of social security contributions. For taxes owed to the Confederation (e.g. value-added tax, customs duties), the payment period can be extended to 31 December 2020 without default interest.¹

SMEs that were well positioned before the crisis are entitled to immediate bridging loans. The National Bank (SNB) supplies the banks with money, they grant the companies loans of up to 10% of their turnover, and the Confederation provides guarantees up to a total of CHF 20 billion. The Federal Council will apply to Parliament for the urgent bridging loan required for this purpose.² These and other emergency measures will be debated in the extraordinary session in May (see adjacent box “Swiss Parliament wants to have a say”).

And now for the fascinating part: The key points of this ambitious programme were laid down by the Federal Council on 20 March in an emergency ordinance. Already on 25 March, i.e. five days later (!), the head of the Federal Department of Finance, Federal Councillor *Ueli Maurer*,

appeared before the media, together with the President of the SNB, the Director of the Financial Market Supervisory Authority (*Finma*) and the President of the Zurich Cantonal Bank (ZKB) as representative of the banks. They announced that they had made the practical implementation of the regulation possible in this short period of time. Each of them – and numerous helpers in the background – have played their part in ensuring that the loans can be drawn down from 26 March (the next day!) at one of the 300 participating banks. – You can read more details in the statement by Federal Councillor *Ueli Maurer*.

“I believe that it is really only possible with us to bring this together in such a short time, and the banks’ initiative is really great. This simply shows that we have a functioning system, and when it comes down to it, we sit together and solve the problems. (Federal Councillor *Ueli Maurer*)

Less bureaucracy for short-time work and unemployment

Short time work:

Numerous Swiss companies have already submitted applications to the authorities for compensation for short-time working. The aim is to compensate employees

“When it comes right down to it, ...”

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who can no longer be fully employed (and paid) as a result of plant closures or a drop in orders. The main objective of this instrument is to preserve jobs.

The Federal Council has now extended the receipt of compensation to, among others, temporary employees and apprentices (the latter normally continue to receive the full apprentice wage in the event of work bottlenecks in the company training centres; unemployment insurance will now take over part of the compensation in order to relieve the employers).

In addition, a number of administrative simplifications apply with immediate effect, such as the abolition of the waiting period or the extension of the authorisation for short-time work from 3 to 6 months.³

Unemployment:

The new measures are designed to reduce the administrative burden on both applicants and the cantonal authorities so that they can process applications as quickly as possible.

The most important thing for employees: the proof of job search is temporarily omitted for employees who are often unemployed from one day to the next (e.g. sales assistants, employees in restaurants, hairdressers) – there are currently indeed hardly any vacancies in these sectors. In order to avoid dowries from unemployment insurance (i.e. switching to social welfare), all persons entitled to benefits receive a maximum of 120 additional daily allowances.⁴

We note with mixed feelings that the employer's obligation to report vacancies to the public employment agency is being temporarily suspended. This will make it easier for companies to find the staff they need abroad.⁵ After the crisis, we citizens must be aware that employers will have to advertise vacancies at home first again, as this is practically the only parliamentary implementation of the demands of the mass immigration initiative.

Longer working hours in hospitals

In contrast to many other working people, the staff in hospitals have their hands full. In the current emergency situation, the Federal Council is temporarily suspending the provisions of the Employment Act on working hours and rest periods because many hospitals are simply unable to comply strictly with them. This is combined with the warning: “However,

Every four seconds somewhere in Switzerland a guarantee is approved

“We have requested Parliament for 1 billion CHF as a supplementary credit of for guarantee losses. 76,000 applications have already been approved and more will follow. These are loans guaranteed by the Confederation. They are therefore not yet federal expenditures. [...] There is also always the question: Are guarantees the right instrument? It is certainly not the right instrument for everyone, because à fonds perdu contributions might be better for some. But I am only distributing your tax money, and distributing other people's

money is always relatively easy. Therefore the way is: we grant guarantees and then try to find solutions when it does not work somewhere, undoubtedly the right approach at the moment. [...] Since last Thursday in Switzerland a guarantee has been granted on average every four seconds – every four seconds.”

Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer at the press conference of 3 April 2020

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

it is still our top priority to ensure that the doctors, nursing staff, specialist employees and all other persons who are making their valuable and committed contribution to coping with this extraordinary situation are sufficiently protected.”⁶ For their protection and for the good of us all!

The self-employed, culture, sport and tourism are also included

Owners of restaurants or shops are today in a similar position to their employees: From one day to the next they have lost their sources of income. But freelance artists are also affected because their engagements are cancelled or because they have to cancel their own events.

These self-employed as well as parents who have to interrupt their gainful employment to care for their children due to school closures receive daily allowances in accordance with the income replacement scheme (EO): 80% of income, up to a maximum of 196 CHF per working day.

For two months, the Confederation will make 280 million CHF available as the first tranche for emergency aid and compensation in the cultural sector, and 100 million CHF for sports organisations. In tourism, immediate measures have been implemented since February 2020, for example to bridge liquidity bottlenecks. Some CHF 300 million have been invested in tourism projects within the framework of regional policy, and the repayment periods for loans to the hotel industry have been extended.⁷

Conclusion: Thanks to the debt brake equipped for times of crisis

Let us note: unlike many other people in the world, we Swiss have no reason to

complain. The fact is that the authorities are doing everything humanly possible to get the population through the period of the corona pandemic even financially as well as possible.

It is good news, but it goes without saying that practically the entire population is involved and shares responsibility for ensuring compliance. Just as the Swiss are used to – the state is us. It is also a fact that the federal finances are in good shape and that there are sufficient reserves for the current crisis because Parliament has observed the rules of the debt brake for many years: No more expenditure than revenue over an economic cycle, or in other words: save for the bad times in good times. In direct democracy this is what the people has decided, both in the Confederation and in the cantons. ●

¹ Seco – State Secretariat for Economic Affairs. “Corona virus: package of measures to mitigate economic consequences.” *Media release of 20 March 2020*

² Seco – State Secretariat for Economic Affairs. “Corona virus: package of measures to mitigate economic consequences.” *Media release of 20 March 2020*

³ “Corona virus: Additional measures to support the economy.” *Federal Council press release of 25 March 2020*

⁴ “Corona virus: Additional measures to support the economy.” *Federal Council press release of 25 March 2020*

⁵ “Corona virus: Additional measures to support the economy.” *Federal Council press release of 25 March 2020*

⁶ Seco – State Secretariat for Economic Affairs. “Corona virus: package of measures to mitigate economic consequences.” *Media release of 20 March 2020*

⁷ Seco – State Secretariat for Economic Affairs. “Corona virus: package of measures to mitigate economic consequences.” *Media release of 20 March 2020*

“It’s simply wonderful how people here participate and how they get involved”

Statement by Federal Councillor Ueli Maurer at the press conference on 25 March 2020



Ueli Maurer
(picture ma)

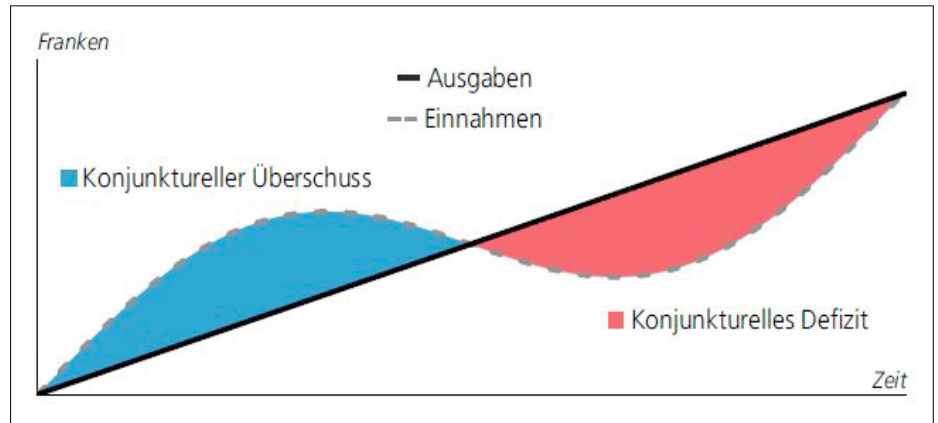
mw. On Friday, 20 March 2020, the Federal Council adopted key points for a liquidity support programme for companies in the form of guarantees to be provided by the Federal Government. Five days later, Feder-

al Councillor Ueli Maurer, Head of the Department of Finance, presented the financial measures to support the economy. His remarks at the media conference on 25 March best reflect in the original what is at stake and how important it is for everyone to work together concisely during this period.

Federal Councillor Maurer: “The Federal Government is making 20 billion loans available for guarantees. It is a matter of finding a balance between the economy and the financial centre so that this can be achieved. That’s much more than just distributing money, it’s about securing financing, which is why you see the National Bank here [points to SNB president *Thomas Jordan* on the podium], it’s about ensuring supervision [points to *Marc Branson*, director of the Swiss Financial Market Supervisory Authority *Finma*], and it’s about showing how this money should be distributed [points to *Martin Scholl*, president of the Zurich Cantonal Bank, as representative of the banks]. After last Friday, I received e-mails from citizens who said: You were bluffing. I went to the bank. They told me that they had lost their heads in Bern, and that it will take at least four weeks before we are able to respond to such requests. Well, we have been working all weekend, really at 18-hour intervals, on the one hand the administration, our lawyers, on the other hand the banks, and today we have passed the regulation, with all the details that are necessary to be able to make these loan applications tomorrow and to make it work”.

Moving ahead rapidly together

Federal Councillor Maurer continues: “When all the CEOs and all the chairmen of the boards of directors of 300 banks in Switzerland are involved in a telephone conference on Sunday morning, you can see how seriously this is taken and how we work together in Switzerland. I think that’s the big difference. In other places, people are willing to throw a considera-



The debt brake regulates expenditures. Over an economic cycle, these must not exceed revenues. (picture © EFD/DFE)

ble sum of money into the pot. We provide them with the details of how to distribute it and how to control it a few days later.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for the work that has been done here in the administration, at the National Bank, at Finma and above all at the banks. [...] This simply shows that we have a functioning system, and when it comes down to it, you sit down together and you solve the problems.

What does the package look like? It is based on what the Federal Council decided last week. There are guarantee credits of up to 500,000 francs, which are in principle granted and paid out immediately without much scrutiny. The interest rate on these loans up to 500,000 francs is 0 (zero) and there are no fees. This, too, is a service provided by the banks that have been involved: People who get a guaranteed loan pay no interest. The second pot that we have announced goes from 500,000 to 20 million, where an interest rate of 0.5% is charged, because more clarifications and more support are needed. The benchmark is turnover, so that we treat everyone as equally as possible. This eliminates start-ups that do not yet have a turnover, that have not been in business for a long time. We have also provided a solution for this in the regulation, so that even very young companies that are already experiencing difficulties can benefit from a guarantee by making an estimate”.

Mutual trust between population and government as the best remedy against abuse

“The question that is asked most often”, says Ueli Maurer, “is after the abuse: What do you do when someone comes and wants something without having a

claim? The moment someone signs an application, he acknowledges that he may be fined up to 100,000 Swiss francs if he gives false information. I assume that people who have a company, people who have put all their assets into that company, are also honest enough not to try to rip off the state. We don’t want that either. We immediately open up all possibilities for you, and I am basically convinced that abuse is practically impossible.

So much for the broad concept of this regulation. It’s a package of 20 billion, an emergency aid. It’s probably not the end of the line. There are bigger companies that may have liquidity problems. That is on our radar, we are looking into that, and the issue of hardship cases that cannot be solved with a guarantee is also on our radar. We will continue to look into these matters and will tackle them step by step.

It is wonderful working here with us, by the way. Every day we receive suggestions from the population, from cantons, from people, written and drawn by hand, concepts of how it could be done. It is simply wonderful how the people here participate and how they get involved.

We would like to point up this balance between the economy and the financial centre: What needs to be done to ensure that what we are launching now is also sustainable in the long term? That it has an effect on the economy as a whole without placing an undue burden on the financial centre.”

Overcoming this difficult phase together

Finally, a quote from the statement by *Martin Scholl*, president of the Direc-

“Money rules the world” – ...?

ds. Under the pressure of the coronavirus pandemic, a reflection has begun as to whether it really makes sense to let money rule the world.

No later than after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989/1990, profit became dogma in the West: Profit, profit, and profit again. Money was made and produced with money, which always only brought in money. The main thing was that the money was right: drugs, weapons, nonsensical rubbish, for which the need first had to be created with equally nonsensical advertising.

Industries were moved to countries where the goods with the greatest profit could be produced. At any sacrifice. Food sent halfway around the world brought more profit than that produced in one's

own country. Headhunting skilled workers in low-wage countries was more profitable than training them oneself. Infrastructure and civil protection were neglected. Taking care of the latter promised too little profit.

And now this: Global trade has stalled. In the country, known worldwide for its pharmaceutical industry, raw materials for medicines are becoming scarce. There is a lack of protective clothing and masks. Deliveries are held back at the borders. Trained nursing staff is needed in the surrounding countries themselves. And, and, and, and...

Now a reflection has begun and we are challenged to develop “with reason and conscience” new forms of economic activity based on people's needs. •

Letter to  the Editor

Does the coronavirus gather our wits?

Not only Germany is in an absolutely exceptional state now, but in fact this goes for all countries around the globe. We can notice that we have a very capable country, from our Chancellor to the Governors of the federal states to the authorities in the municipalities. Now the federal nation state with all its instruments demonstrates its abilities. No polarising attacks, no personal vanities of individual politicians, but stick together now is experiencing in this crisis. I'm also thinking of the executive bodies in the municipalities, the public order offices, police officers and the like who ensure the rules being observed. District governments in North Rhine-Westphalia alone employ numerous staff over a weekend to process the incoming applications for emergency aid from small businesses with few employees and also freelancers who are not allowed to carry out their work, without any red tape. They will receive a non-repayable one-off payment of between 9,000 – 25,000

Euro to bridge the gap. The cash flow is made within a few days.

Furthermore, we observe that a large majority has understood now to behave appropriately and to offer each other help in order to protect their own lives and the lives of others. Despite so many criticisms of our healthcare system we can see now that it works very well and that there, too, a solidarity-based approach to intensive care beds is being exemplified between the federal states. Here we come to the conclusion that cooperation between nations and the importance of national borders for their protection, here for the purpose of containing the pandemic, are not mutually exclusive.

Perhaps this pandemic can also be a global trigger that makes us all come to our wits. No more agitation against political “opponents”, no more increasing the arms budget, no more wars in the world, towards a peaceful coexistence between peoples and a good community within the different societies. The global economy

School with a difference – “grandchildren school” in times of the coronavirus pandemic

dk. Grandmother *Anne* and her granddaughter *Ronja* from the German speaking part of Switzerland work two hours a day on the school material together on the computer. The idea came to them during a phone call together; *Ronja's* father installed the technology for this. *Ronja* attends the third class and practices mathematics, German or sewing with her grandmother. With her help, *Ronja* has already sewn a skirt and is now planning to tailor a jacket, too. *Anne* appreciates this exchange; it benefits both of them and the two have regular and lively contact.

The grandmother can warmly recommend this project to other grandparents for imitation. It is presented on the website www.enkelschule.ch. Instructions for installing the “Whereby” software are included. Telephone support is available for technical problems. The project manager of “grandchildren school”, *Urs Baumann*, sees an opportunity to continue the project after the epidemic, for example as support for children from vulnerable families by senior citizens. •

Source: *Aargauer Zeitung* from 3 April 2020 and www.enkelschule.ch

will slide into a deep recession, that is to be expected. The Western financial system is in danger of being rocked. But precisely this brings hope that the human family will move closer together and the bogeyman *Russia*, *China* or *Assad* will be buried. Rather, the common enemy now is the virus and its global impacts which we can only defeat together.

Werner Voss, Wiehl (Germany)

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“It is simply wonderful ...”

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torate General of the Zurich Cantonal Bank:

“There are many announcements around the globe, but to announce large sums of money as quickly as possible is

one thing, and bringing them to the beneficiaries is another. Ultimately, it is important that the money flows, that the wages are paid and that this difficult phase is mastered together, and quickly. The Federal Council promised a few days ago that it would deliver, and it has done so. With the decision of the Federal Council this

morning, the solution is ready, not only conceptually but also in terms of implementation. This was only possible, the Federal Council said, because on all sides, practically in a 7x24-hours mode, on the basis of mutual trust and respect, solutions were being fought for, sometimes argued about”. •

Corona – Ethics, reason ... and psychology

by Karl-Jürgen Müller

There is not only the pressure, mainly based on economic arguments, to relax the restrictions enacted due to the corona pandemic as quickly as possible. Numerous analysts and commentators are also already concerned about how society, economy and politics should continue to develop after the end of the pandemic. This is despite the fact that the pandemic has most likely not yet reached its peak and the full extent of the consequences cannot yet be foreseen. The aim here is not to reproduce these analyses and comments, let alone to judge them, but rather to make a few fundamental observations.

Nobody wants a long-term state of emergency

1. It is very understandable that the question is raised as to how long the restrictions should continue and what should happen after the end of the pandemic. It would be a fundamental break with the foundations of a free and democratic constitutional state, and people cannot otherwise be expected to prepare themselves for a permanent state of emergency. From war situations in the past and present we know: the longer an exceptional situation lasts, the greater the negative consequences. Man is not made for a permanent state of emergency. He needs the hope that such a state, if it seems necessary for a certain period of time, can be overcome as quickly as possible. Everything else has fatal consequences. A look at Europe during the Thirty Years' War or today at countries in the Middle East or Afghanistan bears eloquent witness to this.

Now the corona pandemic does not mean war. Most people who now stay at home for most of the day, who are restricted in their freedom of movement and community life and who even have to give up their jobs, do not have to fear that bombs will fall on their roofs or that they will be hit by a bullet or grenade while shopping or walking. In countries such as Switzerland, Austria or Germany, no one needs to fear hunger or thirst due to the pandemic. However, the many restrictions on personal freedom are a major break in the lifestyle of many people.

What or who is deciding our future?

2. It is an open question who will decide, after the end of the current restrictions and then also after the end of the pandemic, how we will shape our social, economic and political coexistence in the future. Some things should change – and many also want to see some changes afterwards. After all, the corona pandemic is not just an act of god, but also the result of human

error and omission – by all of us. But the ideas about what should change – and this can already be said on the basis of the analyses and comments available – are very different. This has to do with the different images of man, world views and lifestyles – but also with different political agendas.

In 1945, after the end of the Second World War, Germany, which had been destroyed in many respects, was facing many very valuable ideas as to how the country should be shaped in future. As part of the *Quellen zum politischen Denken der Deutschen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Sources on the political thinking of Germans in the 19th and 20th centuries), edited by the *Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft* in Darmstadt, the volume “Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945–1949” (Postwar Germany 1945–1949), a collection of original texts, was published in 1990 and then again in 2010. It is worth reading the volume again today, 75 years after the end of the war. Some of what can be read there has actually been implemented. Others hardly played a role later. Who today knows about *Eberhard Welty*?¹ He was a Dominican priest and social ethicist, belonging to the “Walberberger Circle” – have you ever heard of that? – striving for Christian socialism based on the ideas of Christian natural law. After the war, Welty pleaded for a “community of states” that was “democratically oriented, securing the fundamental rights of the individual as the image of God within the visible order of creation.” The “basis of social life,” he continued, should be “the common good of the people”, “which was determined by justice and harmony. [...] To regulate it was considered the task and duty of the state. In the economic sphere, this meant that the Christian socialists agreed to the personal property of individuals which, however, could not be accumulated in any quantity and used exclusively for personal purposes, but had to serve primarily to cover personal needs in life”.

Yes, some of this has found its way into the West German Grundgesetz (Basic Law) passed in 1949, for example in the public interest obligations of property in Article 14, but it was not only, or even only to a small extent, the quality of the ideas that decided on their realisation. The real power relations often played a greater role, and the assertiveness then (as now) was not always on the side of ethics and reason. Long before the end of the war, the victorious powers already had their plans for the future of Germany (and the world) and set their stakes. The framework was thus set; all the more so because the victorious powers, who had very different ideas on many points, ceased to look for

an agreement at the beginning of the Cold War, but instead tried to implement their respective programmes in their sphere of influence in pure form.

A state of emergency does not have to lead to dictatorship

3. The current state of emergency with a strong emphasis on the executive power should not tempt anyone to seek a future solution to all social, economic and political problems in “strong leadership”. The solution of problems always remains a task for the community. This applies not only to the fight against the corona pandemic – fortunately, the representatives of the state power that is now in the foreground have also repeatedly emphasised this, and rightly so – but also to all future public tasks. This also fundamentally distinguishes the current situation from the dictatorship feared or conjured up by some: those responsible are now well aware that coercion and violence would lead to a dead end. Ethics and reason must take precedence, especially now.

Already more than 90 years ago, in 1928, the Viennese individual psychologist *Alfred Adler* characterised the fundamental error of the path of power:

“The result of individual and social psychological inquiry is therefore: The striving for personal power is a disastrous delusion and poisons man's living together. Whoever desires the human community must renounce the striving for power over others. To prevail through violence appears to many as an obvious thought. And we admit: the simplest way to attain everything that is good and promises happiness, or even merely what is in the line of a continuous evolution seems to be by means of power. But where in the life of men or in the history of mankind has such an attempt ever succeeded? As far as we can see, even the use of mild violence awakens opposition everywhere, even where the welfare of the subjugated is obviously intended.”²

The fact that so far the overwhelming majority of citizens have approved the measures of their states from insight (see box) is a valuable community asset. It must be handled with care.

Hope for more scope for ethics and reason

4. The reactions of those responsible in the media, in business and politics show a

"Corona –Ethics, reason ..."

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multitude of statements, which nevertheless clearly deviate from what one would have expected from the times before. For example, who would have thought weeks ago that the German Chancellor *Angela Merkel* would take such an appropriate and even appealing stand on the pandemic threat? Perhaps there really is good reason to hope that ethics and reason will find more scope, also on the part of those with social, economic and political responsibility. But above all, we should not fool ourselves: It is a mistake to think that "the powers that be" in our view are so much different from us. It is very unlikely that only this group of people has done everything wrong over the past few years and that if we had had our way, everything would look much better. Things will only get better if every person is accepted as an equal partner in dialogue, and this argument works both ways. Citizens on their high horse, full of wrath against all "powers that be" will help just as little as politicians as wiseacres.

Let us not forget the victims of global power politics

5. Many know that in the current pandemic situation there are states and people who are much worse off than we are. Among them there are also those whose situation is not only due to their own mistakes and omissions, but who are also victims of a global power politics. The sanctions and wars against these countries have always been a scourge and are greatly exacerbating the current situation. Certainly this kind of policy is not sustainable either. It must be corrected.

And couldn't the corona pandemic, which affects all countries of the world, also be an occasion for dismantling previous enemy images and recognising that the world community is all in the same boat? UN Secretary-General *António Guterres* made an impressive statement on the pandemic in an international video conference on 31 March 2020. According to Guterres, the global community is facing the biggest crisis since the Second World War. This crisis will bring about an economic slump that "probably has no parallel in recent history". With regard to the economic consequences, he called for more help from the rich to the poor countries of the world. The recovery from the COVID-19 crisis must lead more equal economies.

That's something we can agree with. But questions arise when he calls for a

comprehensive "leadership of the World Health Organization (WHO)" in fighting the pandemic. How sensible is it to call now again for global governance? Equal cooperation and mutual assistance in the international community and within the framework of international law are required. Problems, however, are best solved locally. This includes a state authority legitimised by its citizens within a generally sovereign state governed by the rule of law and constitution. This is being demonstrated again right now. And it is also true for the future.

Problems are best solved locally

6. The tasks involved in combating the corona pandemic also vary greatly from country to country and require appropriate solutions. Of course, many countries also need help for this. On 27 March 2020, the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" reported on the current situation in South Eastern Europe and Brazil. The problems arising there are different from those in Switzerland, Austria or Germany. While in our countries, for example, it is usually up to each of us to decide whether the required hygiene and distance recommendations are observed, this is simply not possible at all in the poor districts of Rio de Janeiro. Here, even state power has little access, and instead criminal gangs are controlling the daily routine. Or in the states of the European Balkans: here, thousands of doctors and nurses have migrated and were poached away to the richer states of Europe in recent years which are now bitterly wanted.

Some of the comments of the past days show certain impatience. They document that some people would like to end the state of emergency quickly, requiring to know at this point how things will be "afterwards". There are often easily understandable reasons for this – for the economy, for the labour market, for families with school-age children, for single people, for those working tirelessly in the health sector and for many more, the current situation is indeed highly demanding. But as long as there is no convincing perspective for a real end to the pandemic, not only plans for the future are needed, but also many creative, compassionate ideas and actions, so that as many people as possible can survive and cope with the current situation – in every respect. It is good that there are so many examples of just this. •

¹ cf. Bucher, Peter (eds.) *Nachkriegsdeutschland 1945–1949. Band X der Quellen zum politischen Denken der Deutschen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, (Post-war Germany 1945–1949. volume X of the Sources for the Political Thought of the Germans in the 19th and 20th Century), Darmstadt 2010, p. 3 with references to the literature of Eberhard Welty

² *Adler, Alfred. The Collected Clinical Works of Alfred Adler*, Volume 6, Journal articles: 1927–1931, 2004 by the Classical Adlerian Translation Project, Henry T. Stein, Bellingham, USA

³ "Rios Gangs verhängen Ausgangssperre" und "Gefährlicher Ärztemangel in Südosteuropa". ("Rio gangs impose curfew" and "Dangerous shortage of doctors in southeastern Europe"). In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* from 27 March 2020, p. 3 and p. 5

The population has confidence in the measures taken by the German State

km. The opinion research institute Infratest dimap asked about 1,000 voters in Germany for their opinion in a representative telephone survey on 30 and 31 March 2020. Tagesschau.de reported in detail on the results of the survey on 2 April 2020. (<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend-2167.html>). Excerpts from the survey are reproduced below.

"A large majority of 93% of Germans continue to support the idea that people are currently only allowed to meet with members of the same household or with one more person.

Four-fifths (79%) are hardly concerned about the fact that everyday goods are becoming scarce. When asked whether they are worried about losing their jobs, the picture is clear:

three-quarters indicate that their concerns are little (29%) or even less (46%).

The trust of citizens in healthcare facilities and physicians in Germany is predominantly high. 77 % have a very high (22 %) or high (55 %) confidence that they can cope with the coronavirus epidemic. For 61 % of those surveyed, the concern that not every person with COVID-19 in Germany will receive adequate medical care is little (48 %) or even less (13 %).

Two thirds of Germans (65%) think it is right that German policy in the corona crisis has given priority to national thinking and action. Just as many (64%) also believe that wealthy states like Germany right now should be spending extra money to support people in poorer regions of the world."

All of us together

How France is learning to deal with the Corona pandemic

Nicole Duprat, France

«Culture means assistance from person to person and from nation to nation.»

Henry Dunant

Like other countries, France suddenly found itself confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic. The draconian curfew, the rules of hygiene, the extreme restrictions on all freedom of movement were quickly accepted and implemented by the population as a whole, although there were severe penalties for the few dodgers. Now is not the time to dwell on polemics or the various conspiracy theories currently circulating on the Internet; we must face up to the situation.

Forms of solidarity

The generations that currently have both feet on the ground have not experienced the war and its hardships, while older people can still remember the restrictions very well. And yet everyone is now on hand to show solidarity, to care for people cost-free, to do voluntary work, to be attentive and understanding. The restrictions induce some people to rediscover family life; others enjoy good reading or rediscover old recipes, so as to cook for others.

Gestures of attention towards the poorest and those who are particularly affected by the situation are increasing. We encounter generosity everywhere, and this is like a balm for the soul, since we feel care and fellowship in the face of this difficult situation.

Since the curfew came into force on 17 March 2020, many people throughout the country are in an even worse situation than before, although their lives had sometimes already been difficult previously: the elderly, the disabled and the homeless. They are particularly and directly affected by isolation.

The schools are closed, but the teachers are ready to look after the children of the medical staff there.

Many volunteers are getting in touch with farmers seeking help

Since the outbreak of the crisis, there have fortunately been repeated expressions of solidarity in people's immediate vicinity, such as offers to take over shopping for the neediest neighbours. In order to support these small but no less great deeds, the government has set up a platform (jeveuxaider.gouv.fr) where you can register as an individual or as an association to provide this kind of help.



(picture keystone)

An expression of gratitude

It is touching to see how every evening at 8 p.m., in big cities as well as in villages, people step out onto their balconies or go to their windows, and there either sing the national anthem or make other music to express their gratitude to the doctors and nurses who are in the front lines of this health war.

In Paris, the Eiffel Tower remains illuminated throughout the evening, displaying a large MERCI to honour the nursing staff and all other emergency personnel.

It must also be emphasized that many people working in the health sector (professors, doctors, radiologists, anesthetists, nurses, etc.) have put aside their social and financial demands because of the current crisis in their hospitals. Instead, they are on the spot and persistently and courageously care for their patients.

At the request of the bishops, the bells of all the French churches rang for ten minutes at 7:30 p.m. on 25 March, i.e. on Annunciation Day. This was to be in support of the grieving families and the nation as a whole.

China has not forgotten that France helped them by supplying five million protective masks during the growing epidemic. In return, planes from China have now landed in France to distribute parcels of masks.

Gratifying initiatives

Because a gardener from Plergier had to close his shop, he was left with several thousands of flowers that he was unable to sell. He decided to use them to decorate

the graves of the municipal cemetery. His gesture was well received by many people, and some florists have since emulated him.

The emergency personnel at the Lapeyronie hospital in Montpellier were in for a pleasant surprise: a restaurant in the city delivered 60 pizzas in support of them, as it had been forced to close.

Three production plants of the luxury group LVMH, which normally manufacture perfumes and cosmetics (*Dior*, *Guerlain* and *Gucci*), are producing large quantities of disinfectant gel which they make available to hospitals.

At the insistence of the public authorities, the SNCF (French Railways) has had to drastically reduce the service of its intercity trains and TGVs. One train, however, has served as an infirmary and brought the necessary medical equipment, nursing staff and 20 COVID-19 patients to the hospitals in Angers, Le Mans, Nantes and Roche-sur-Yon.

The hospital of Saint-Brieux in Brittany has provided a template for a do-it-yourself fabric mask for nursing staff and for all others also needing a mask. All dressmakers, even beginners, have taken out their sewing machines and their own fabrics at home and started sewing the mask, the instructions for which you can download on the internet. Even if these fabric masks do not correspond to FFPP2 masks, they are still helpful, provided you wash them daily at 60 degrees.

"All of us together"

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**Return of businesses
and national sovereignty**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we are experiencing an explosive revitalisation of local products, especially in the agricultural sector. Common sense seems to be returning! For whatever reason should we buy garlic from Chile, when Provence is the area par excellence for growing garlic, which is also widely used in the regional cuisine.

Many companies with branches all over the world are seeing their turnover plummet due to the borders being closed, and are therefore considering distributing their products locally and within their own respective country! Common sense seems to be returning here too!

On the occasion of an appointment with a mask manufacturer in a suburb of Angers, *Emmanuel Macron*, in a speech, renounced his usual liberal statements and instead expressed himself clearly in favour of state sovereignty. To be precise, our Head of State demanded "the complete independence of France" concerning the production of masks. By the end of the year, France is to be independent in the production of masks, whether they are FFPP2 masks, surgical masks or category 3 or 4 masks. "Produce more and thereby restore our independence", those were his words.

Taking curfew with a touch of humour

During the time of the corona virus and in view of the pandemic, laughter is a real challenge. The French love to laugh. So there are many posts on the subject of "Stay home!" Let us here quote a modified entry from the famous *Routard* travel guide, which suggests: "A new destination in 2020: your home! Your essential guide to discover the most extraordinary corners of your habitat!"

Since curfew began on 17 March, we have been inundated with videos, drawings and parodistic messages. Some of us laugh and send them to our loved ones via *Facebook*, *Messenger*, *WhatsApp*, etc. Because humour is good to keep a bit of light-heartedness and to keep in touch with your relatives, family, colleagues and friends, when you have nothing new to tell about the days that are slowly becoming always the same.

And after all, isn't it said that "humour is the polite form of despair" even though most of us don't have a relative who was killed by COVID-19?

Internet users are talented, and children are not spared either: there are ironic entries about their begetters, who in a closed world are now discovering who their children really are: "thinking of all parents

who are beginning to realise that the problem may not always lie with the teacher."

Taking things with humour is a survival strategy in such scary situations. Humour is the drive that allows us to experience a situation less dramatically.

Given what life has planned for us, we have no choice. What we can very well decide on, however, is how we deal with the situation. To approach this historical situation in the most constructive way is the attitude that must be cultivated so that goodwill and solidarity can spread in this one world of ours. Creating and re-establishing connections is the top priority in a society that tends to allow itself to be quickly divided. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)**Pope Francis calls for global ceasefire**

In face of the corona pandemic, Pope Francis is calling for a worldwide ceasefire. At his Angelus prayer on Sunday [29 March 2020] he joined a corresponding appeal by UN Secretary General António Guterres.

He invited everyone to follow it by "ceasing all forms of hostility," the Pope said during the prayer that took place in the Vatican without outside participants because of the coronavirus crisis. Francis also promoted for the "creation of humanitarian aid routes and the opening of diplomatic channels". It was now necessary to focus on "those who are in situations of great vulnerability."

"May our joint fight against the pandemic bring everyone to recognise the great need to reinforce brotherly and sisterly bonds as members of a single human family. In particular, may it inspire a renewed commitment to overcome rivalries among the leaders of nations and the parties involved."

**"Conflicts cannot
be resolved by war"**

Guterres had called for an end to all fighting in New York a few days ago. "End the sickness of war and fight the disease that is ravaging our world," he said in a video message. "That is what our human family needs, now more than ever." The United Nations Secretary General offered the assistance of the United Nations to negotiate ceasefires. These are necessary for humanitarian aid and for new diplomatic initiatives.

Conflicts could "not be resolved through war," the Pope warned. "Antagonism and differences must be overcome through dialogue and a constructive search for peace."

Source: <https://www.vaticannews.va/de/papst/news/2020-03/papst-franziskus-corona-virus-appell-angelus-waffenstillstand.html> from 29 March 2020

(Translation *Current Concerns*)