



Grupo de Trabajo Internacional para la protección a Pueblos Indígenas en Aislamiento y Contacto Inicial



COORDINADORA DE LAS ORGANIZACIONES INDÍGENAS DE LA CUENCA AMAZÓNICA

PRIORITIZING COVID-19 VACCINATION IN TERRITORIES SHARED WITH OR ADJACENT TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN ISOLATION AND INITIAL CONTACT - PIACI

The International Working Group for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples in Isolation and Initial Contact in the Amazon and Gran Chaco - PIACI IWG - which brings together 20 indigenous and allied organizations from seven South American countries, and the Coordinating Body of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin - COICA, issue this joint communiqué addressed to the governments of the region, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur and Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations, civil society and the public in general, to express our concern about the continued risks to life and well-being associated with the COVID-19 pandemic in PIACI territories in South America, and to call for the prioritization of vaccination among local populations living in the territorial scope of these highly vulnerable peoples.

Following the WHO's declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic there have been repeated calls for the urgent implementation of measures to protect the life and health of the PIACI given their special vulnerability to infectious and contagious diseases. This situation is further exacerbated by the increased risk of contagion due to inadequate state control over the activities of external actors in PIACI territories and the proliferation of threats to their security from extractive fronts, colonization and various public development initiatives.

As part of the Urgent Recommendations issued by the PIACI IWG, states were urged to establish "health protection cordons" as a PIACI protection mechanism against COVID-19, an initiative directly derived from UN-established guidelines seeking to safeguard the lives and the possibility of collective survival of the PIACI in the Amazon and Gran Chaco (OHCHR 2012) through the effective health protection of these highly vulnerable peoples. It is vital that responses to the health crisis are developed within an intercultural framework, with respect for indigenous rights, and guarantee the participation of indigenous organizations and communities in the PIACI territorial sphere.

The recommendations issued include preventative and contingency response initiatives such as information dissemination and awareness-raising among local populations, territorial control and surveillance, epidemiological surveillance systems and the strengthening of healthcare systems in strategic sectors, among others.

TA little over a year after the declaration of the pandemic, COICA and the PIACI IWG note serious shortcomings in different countries regarding the implementation of measures to protect PIACI from COVID-19:



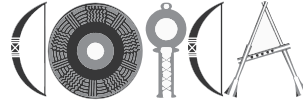
- During the course of the pandemic COVID-19 has reached the territorial vicinity of various peoples in isolation and initial contact in a number of countries, mainly through transmission chains spread by external actors, resulting in several outbreaks among highly vulnerable peoples in different parts of the region. Accurate impact assessment is plagued by a lack of information and the general underreporting of cases among indigenous peoples.
- Health protection cordons, which were specifically recommended by the UN in the initial stages of the pandemic for the mitigation and management of risks posed by the spread of COVID-19, have either not been created or not been effectively implemented on the ground in the framework of emergency response plans.
- Measures to strengthen the capacity, resources and personnel of the healthcare facilities needed to address the extreme health risk in PIACI territories have been insufficient, intermittent or non-existent.
- The tolerance of government authorities towards the activities of external actors within or nearby PIACI territories, and the absence of measures to guarantee the protection and intangibility of these territories, despite repeated appeals, limit the effectiveness of measures to control the spread of COVID-19 and increase the vulnerability of communities in these areas.
- Government entities responsible for PIACI protection have demonstrated poor leadership and a limited capacity to coordinate effective inter-sectoral responses or develop and implement protection frameworks and protocols, which has resulted in de facto inaction and ambiguity in the territories.
- There have been a number of weaknesses in the planning and implementation of emergency measures to guarantee adequate information and the right to participation of representative organizations and communities, which in practice has had negative consequences for the efficient management of the emergency in these areas, particularly in terms of awareness-raising among local populations, community surveillance and monitoring systems, and the implementation of protocols and protection measures.
- In the countries of the region where COVID-19 vaccination programs have been developed and/or implemented, there has been no explicit prioritization to immunizing local populations that either share or border PIACI territory or the health protection cordons that have been established.

Faced with the persistent and widespread risks in the territorial sphere of the PIACI due to the COVID-19 pandemic, COICA and the PIACI IWG wish to state the following:

1. Given the growing incidence of COVID-19 in the region's countries and the identification of new variants of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that may imply a greater capacity for transmission and resistance to



Grupo de Trabajo Internacional para la protección a Pueblos Indígenas en Aislamiento y Contacto Inicial



COORDINADORA DE LAS ORGANIZACIONES INDÍGENAS DE LA CUENCA AMAZÓNICA

existing vaccines, and thereby make it more difficult to control, we reiterate our call for compliance with the urgent protection recommendations initially made at the beginning of the pandemic. These risks are further exacerbated by the spread of false information and the growing demoralization of local populations in the face of the pandemic's prolonged duration and the inadequate measures taken to tackle it.

2. In order to mitigate the risks of contagion, we recommend that vaccination programs prioritize both proposed and already established PIACI health protection cordons, as well as the vaccination of local populations located in territories shared with or nearby the PIACI.

3. We remind states that measures to safeguard the life and integrity of citizens are mandatory by virtue of the specific international obligations established under the American Convention on Human Rights, especially in the case of highly vulnerable population groups such as the PIACI.

4. We stress the need to ensure the right of indigenous peoples' representative organizations to participate in the planning and implementation of measures to address the pandemic, including vaccination programs, which must be accompanied by culturally- and linguistically-appropriate information programs and guarantee the voluntary, free, prior and informed consent of the communities.