

AHF: Former Presidents and Experts Call on Latin America to Act as a Bloc in the Face of Health Emergencies



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“The region needs its own mechanism for cooperation and coordination in public health”

MEXICO CITY--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Without regional cooperation, Latin America will not be able to adequately confront the next health emergency. This was the central message of the high-level panel organized by the **AHF Global Public Health Institute** and the **University of Miami's Public Health Policy Lab**, where regional leaders agreed that it is urgent to build a Latin American architecture capable of responding as a bloc to future health crises.

The webinar, moderated by **Dr. Jorge Saavedra**, Executive Director of the AHF Institute, brought together former presidents **Guillermo Lasso** (Ecuador) and **Laura Chinchilla** (Costa Rica), former Minister of Health **Dr. Patricia García** (Peru), and Mexico's Director General of Epidemiology, **Dr. Miguel Ángel Lezana**, for a conversation on the failures in international cooperation revealed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to establish a regional mechanism that complements national, sub-regional, and global efforts.

Recording of the panel available here: *¿Por qué Latinoamérica debe actuar como bloque ante emergencias sanitarias?*

A forceful message: “Latin America must act as a bloc.”

The panelists agreed that the absence of a regional coordination and cooperation mechanism left the region exposed during the pandemic—and that this vulnerability persists. While other regions have structures such as the **European CDC**, **Africa CDC**, or the **ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED)** in Southeast Asia, Latin America still lacks an equivalent system.

Guillermo Lasso: “I did not feel any regional or global cooperation during the pandemic.”

Former president Lasso was direct in describing Ecuador’s experience during the most critical months of COVID-19:

“I did not feel any regional or global cooperation during the pandemic. If Latin America does not come together now, we will face the next emergency just as alone — or even worse prepared.”

Lasso emphasized the urgency of advancing a proposal at the presidential level:

“We need a Latin American technical body, not a politicized one, that responds to our needs. We must present this idea directly to the region’s heads of state and move toward a presidential meeting dedicated to this issue.”

Laura Chinchilla: “Maximalism paralyzes us; we need concrete steps.”

The former president of Costa Rica warned about regional fragmentation and the lack of political coordination during the pandemic:

“Our countries did not speak with one voice when we needed it most. That disconnection weakened us. In a region increasingly relevant on the global stage, we cannot continue improvising.”

She also addressed one of the most persistent structural obstacles:

“In our region, slogans abound and concrete actions are scarce. During the pandemic we saw how harmful maximalism can be; that approach paralyzes us. If Latin America truly wants to act as a bloc, it must start with gradual steps, building on the capacities that already exist. Otherwise, we will once again arrive too late.”

Chinchilla stressed that a gradual strategy would allow realistic progress toward a stronger regional architecture.

Patricia García: “The pandemic showed that no regional platform existed that could help us.”

From a technical and governance perspective, Dr. Patricia García was clear about the structural limitations:

“During the pandemic, nationalism prevailed. Each country did what it could with its own resources. There were no regional or global platforms capable of coordinating responses. The region lacked effective instruments that could truly help us.”

The former minister outlined a roadmap to build a functional Latin American public health coalition based on three pillars:

- **A virtual regional technical center**, complementary to PAHO, with integrated surveillance, laboratories, modeling, and rapid activation.
- **A minimum and binding political agreement**, grounded in immediate data-sharing, interoperability, and regulatory recognition.
- **A dedicated financing mechanism**, including participation from non-traditional actors such as development banks and hybrid funds.

Miguel Ángel Lezana: “Sharing information is the basis of any regional mechanism.”

Mexico’s Director General of Epidemiology, Dr. Miguel Ángel Lezana, emphasized the importance of surveillance as a tool for action:

“Epidemiological surveillance is information for action. If we want a Latin American mechanism that works, the first step is to build structures that allow real-time information sharing. Without data, there is no action.”

He proposed strengthening:

- public health laboratories,
- surveillance of environmental and zoonotic events,
- and a common analytical framework that enables harmonized methodologies across the region.

Conclusion: A call to anticipate, not react

The panel ended with a shared warning: Latin America cannot continue reacting in a fragmented manner to public health emergencies. The region must adopt a more integrated vision and build a coordination and cooperation mechanism that enables it to act as a true Latin American bloc during health crises.

“We cannot remain trapped in paralysis by analysis. The next health emergency will not wait for us to resolve political differences. Latin America must anticipate, not react.”

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