



Les Rencontres Économiques – Aix-en-Seine
3, 4 et 5 Juillet 2020 – July 3,4 & 5
Agir face aux dérèglements du monde
Dealing with world disorders

Session 9 – Reconsidering global health

Rencontres Economiques d'Aix en Provence

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Learning from COVID to save our world

New pathogens will continue to evolve and spread. Indeed as we deplete habitats, wreak climate havoc, grow food industrially and use vital antibiotics widely in agriculture, we can expect new infections more often. COVID-19 is just the latest, not the worst possible, and will certainly not be the last.

It has caught even the wealthiest nations unprepared; their massive armaments useless against a tiny, mindless aggregation of RNA, a few proteins and a thin lipid envelope. Nations investing obscene sums in nuclear weapons that must never be used have been unable to provide the most basic of protective equipment - gowns, gloves, and facemasks for their frontline health professionals putting themselves in danger every day.

This coronavirus can teach us a lot if we are willing to learn.

It shows where the real threats to our security lie, for which massive military arsenals and the worst weapons of mass destruction are not only useless, but get in the way.

It shows our interconnected vulnerabilities and capacities, that globalized problems respect no borders, are shared and demand cooperation.

It has shown how quickly ideological baggage and the exceptionalist hubris of arrogant leaders serving their own and narrow vested interests can cause great harm; evil measured in monumental failures of leadership, with tens of thousands of deaths that could readily have been prevented.

It has laid bare that respect for truth and evidence; and deferring to its expert custodians, are crucial.



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It has demonstrated that changes deemed unthinkable can not only be made, but made rapidly.

It has shown that female leaders are often more sensible and reliable in a crisis, and that we need more of them.

It has shown the great ingenuity, resourcefulness and kindness that people everywhere are capable of.

We can prevent some new pandemics from occurring. We can always respond better if we have good early warning systems, heed evidence and experts, prepare well for what we can expect, and act promptly. We need a strong WHO, and our governments need to support it. WHO should not have to go begging for more than 75% of its needs because regular contributions provide little more than 20% of its meagre budget.

However, there are two human-made existential threats looming over our world. A hospitable and stable climate is essential for human survival and planetary health. It needs to be protected from both accelerating global heating, and the abrupt [ice age](#) and unprecedented [global famine](#) that would follow a nuclear war involving even less than 1% of the global nuclear arsenal igniting cities. The danger of nuclear war is growing. Unless nuclear weapons are eliminated, some day they will inevitably be used again, and all human achievements and efforts could be tragically swept aside by indiscriminate nuclear violence.

COVID will abate. However after a nuclear war there will be no re-building. It would be the final epidemic for which there is no cure, only prevention. The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons provides the best available path to end nuclear weapons before they end us. We should heed the lessons of COVID and take that path, as if our lives depend on it, because they do.