



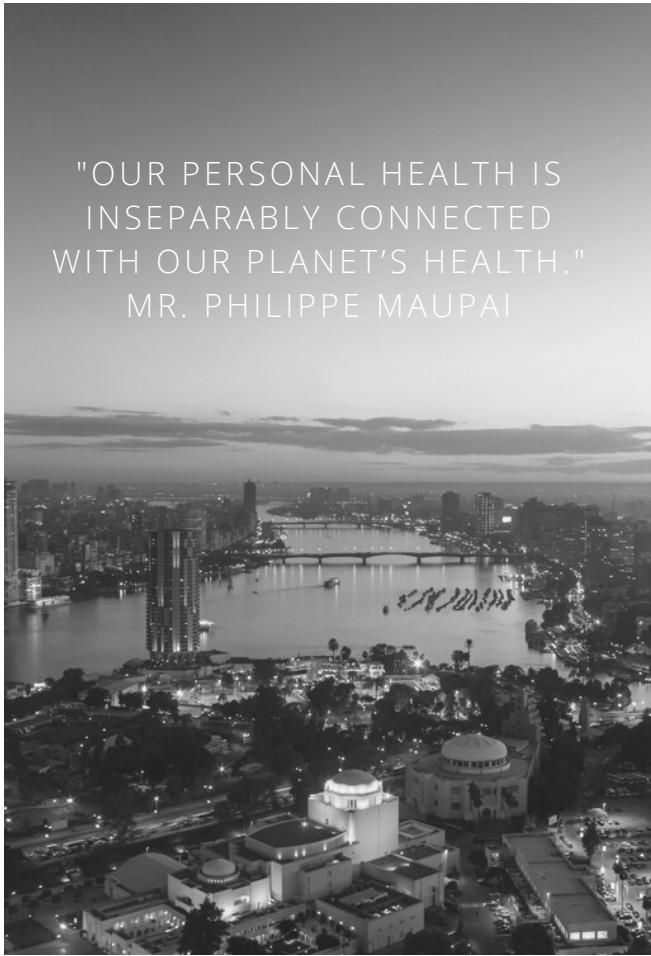
67TH CAIRO CLIMATE TALK REPORT

# COVID-19, HEALTH AND THE CLIMATE: ARE WE ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS?

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22 JULY 2020 // PREPARED BY AMENA SHARAF & LILLY VON STACKELBERG

"OUR PERSONAL HEALTH IS  
INSEPARABLY CONNECTED  
WITH OUR PLANET'S HEALTH."  
MR. PHILIPPE MAUPAI



*On the 22nd of July 2020 the 67th Cairo Climate Talk invited panelists to discuss the novel approach of Planetary Health and its relation to the Covid-19 crisis.*

In the talk titled "Covid-19, Health and the Climate: Are we asking the right questions?" health and environmental experts from Egypt and Germany explained how the wellbeing of the planet is closely connected to the health of humans. It was the first CCT that was delivered virtually via Zoom due to the ongoing safety recommendations. Simultaneous translation into Arabic was offered.

In his opening statement **Mr. Philippe Maupai**, Head of the Science Department at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, reminded the audience that "the more we learn about this virus and our health, the more we understand that our personal health is inseparably connected with our planet's health." In her opening statement, Panelist **Dr. Nicole de Paula**, Klaus Töpfer Sustainability Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS) in Potsdam, Germany, rejected the celebratory reaction of climate activists and on social media praising the positive effects of Covid-19 on the climate, she urged people to remember that "Climate change is about environmental

justice, people might have been able to see mountains for the first time in Beijing but millions of people were dying, and that's not how we want to solve climate change". She highlighted the importance of a wholistic approach to solve current crises rather than viewing the climate crisis and the health crisis as two separate and unique incidents and suggested that planetary health encompasses that approach.

## PLANETARY HEALTH AS A CONCEPT WAS FIRST INTRODUCED IN 2015.

Planetary health as a concept was first introduced in a report from the Rockefeller Brothers Foundation in 2015, and the subsequently founded Planetary Health Alliance has been active ever since. Dr. Nicole explained that planetary health is not a technical solution, but rather a way of seeing things. **Dr. Wagida Anwar**, professor of Public Health at the Faculty of Medicine at Ain Shams University, added that the idea of thinking health and environment together to break open single-issue and silo approaches is not new, it has been discussed with different names such as One Health and often relates to the field of Public Health. **Ms. Ragia ElGerzawy**, Environmental Justice File Officer at the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR), pointed out that environmental justice needs to be at the core of how we address the crises, recovery and beyond. Environmental justice encompasses people's rights for a safe environment, access to health care and a sustainable way of planning for communities, responding to their needs, and drafting economic and social policies. Ms. Ragia asserted that right now is a vital moment for planetary health as it is getting increasing recognition by institutions like the WHO, who have already "declared climate change as one of the major health threats" as "it threatens our progress in decreasing child mortality rates and conquering infectious diseases".

## COORDINATING EFFORTS FOR SUSTAINING THE ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH CARE IS ESSENTIAL.

Dr. Wagida praised the collaboration between different institutions and ministries that manifested during the Covid-19 crisis and expressed her hope that this cooperative momentum will continue beyond this crisis and the recovery. “We need a more practical way for implementation and to link different actions in a way that is productive and geared towards the solution” she said. As an example of this ongoing collaboration and as a response to the health and economic crises Dr. Wagida mentioned that the Ministry of Environment is currently coordinating efforts between different stakeholders including the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation to address how different pollutants are contributing to the spreading of the disease and how the disease is causing a surge in solid waste, particularly in hazardous medical waste.

## DISRUPTING ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS LEADS TO EMERGING DISEASES.

Ms. Ragia emphasized that “destroying wildlife, biodiversity, depleting forests and using lands for cultivation, all those practices and interactions are the cause of new emerging diseases.” She stated that since the start of this century, which is known as the [Anthropocene](#), we’ve seen multiple viruses and diseases that are directly correlated to these practices. Ms. Ragia underlined that threats are not distributed equally in societies. People of specific occupational and socioeconomic backgrounds face a double threat, as they are already disproportionately exposed to pollution, which increases their vulnerability to Covid-19. With deaths attributed to air pollution in Egypt in 2016 reaching 60,000 annually, it becomes evident that the health of the population prior to health crises affects mortality rates.

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN NATIONAL CURRICULA IS KEY TO CREATE AWARENESS.

In order to change these practices, generate awareness and come up with new approaches to address these complex and interlinked challenges, all panelists agreed that the key is education. Dr. Nicole highlighted that since students are not currently in schools, we have a chance to focus increasingly on digitalization; “That’s the revolution we’re going to see, the revolution in digitalization of knowledge and education”. Dr. Wagida agreed, identifying the importance of blended learning approaches which take into account old and new teaching methods to achieve optimal environmental education and awareness. Ms. Ragia however remarked that until now the Ministry of Education is yet to integrated climate change and environment into national curricula.

The Covid-19 crisis, everyone agreed, is no reason to celebrate, but rather a great momentum to push further for co-creation, knowledge sharing and interdisciplinary approaches to mitigate and build resilience to the domino effect we have seen Covid-19 create, and which we know future shocks will continue to trigger. As Dr. Nicole said, planetary health is a social movement, that creates this dialogue across disciplines and incorporates underrepresented groups by increasing accessibility; “We need to have different voices around the table, especially when it comes to decisions making. For example, we need to address the role of women and how we can make sure the conversation stays diverse” she concluded.

## DR. WAGIDA ANWAR

PROFESSOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH, FACULTY OF MEDICINE, AIN SHAMS UNIVERSITY

Dr. Anwar is a Professor at Department of Community, Environmental and Occupational Medicine; Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, Egypt. Dr. Anwar graduated from the Faculty of Medicine, Ain Shams University, in December 1977. She obtained her training from several institutions in different countries such as France, USA, Germany, and Finland. She was the General Coordinator of Health System Improvement Programs at the Ministry of Health (MOH), and a member of several national and international committees. She has a role in encouraging research at the Egyptian Academy of Scientific Research and Technology (ASRT). She is a member of the National Committee of Toxicology, the National Council for Environment Research at ASRT and President of the Egyptian and Pan African Environmental Mutagen Society.

Dr. Nicole de Paula holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from Sciences Po Paris and has been consulting with several international organizations under the UN system on themes related to climate change, biodiversity, chemicals, financial and urban affairs. For more than a decade, she has been globally connecting policymakers and researchers to create a public understanding on key issues related to sustainability, environment and public health. Her mission is to promote research and inform the linkages of health and wellbeing with sustainable development, environmental conservation, and social equity. She is also the founder of the Women Leaders for Planetary Health. Her most recent research focuses on decision making and international cooperation in the post-Covid19 world, as well as digitalization and sustainability.

## DR. NICOLE DE PAULA

KLAUS TÖPFER  
SUSTAINABILITY FELLOW,  
INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED  
SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES  
(IASS)

## MS. RAGIA ELGERZAWY

ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH FILE OFFICER, EGYPTIAN INITIATIVE FOR PERSONAL RIGHTS (EIPR)

Dr. Ragia graduated from the Faculty of Medicine and obtained a master's degree in clinical pathology from Cairo University. In addition to her work as a medical doctor, Dr. Ragia has been involved in civil society activities related to health rights and environmental justice issues. Acknowledging the solid interconnection between health, development, social justice and environment, Dr. Ragia shifted her career to environmental justice. Her work mainly focused on environment pollution, sustainable development, energy and climate change issues.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

**Cairo Climate Talks** are conceived, organized and hosted as a cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of Environment, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ).



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