

OPEN LETTER TO LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Hunger and malnutrition, the other side of the coronavirus

While the coronavirus pandemic is gradually being contained in China, Latin America and the Caribbean it is spreading rapidly and has now reached all its countries.

As members of the Parliamentary Front against Hunger, we appeal to decision-makers and to always consider among emergency measures: the protection of the right to food of the Latin American and Caribbean population.

We cannot open the door to scarcity. We must all ensure that the chain of production, processing and food supply remain active.

At this point, we turn to consumers to avoid hoarding, and private companies to keep their distribution systems accessible to the entire population, and promote conscious purchasing and no food waste.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, not everyone has the means to adequately feed themselves in a state of quarantine.

Therefore, it is also crucial that countries address food emergency measures aimed at the most vulnerable sectors. We refer, in particular, to children, senior citizens and those with lower incomes.

Just to give an example, some 85 million children in our region are fed in schools, and even more alarming is that for about 10 million, this benefit is the only source of safe food they receive on a daily basis.

According to FAO, eating enough food, diverse and nutritious, strengthens our immune system and increases our ability to cope with illness.

We must not forget that there are already 42.5 million people in Latin American and Caribbean countries that lack the necessary nutrients for a healthy and active life.

We must do everything in our power so that this number does not increase and thus avoid health, economic and food crises.

We must not also forget that our countries coexist with a high prevalence of overweight and obesity. The stress of confinement and social distancing can lead to worsening habits and accentuate the consumption of less healthy foods.

We must protect family farms and provide alternatives to small farmers so that they can, considering all health safeguards, get fresh and nutritious food to our population.

There is no doubt that right now, more than ever, we are obliged to rethink the social role of our food systems, strengthen them for moments of crisis and transform them into more sustainable and healthy systems.

We must seek opportunities for collaboration, not only to face the current scenario but to mitigate future impacts on food and nutrition security of millions of families.

Undoubtedly, one of these opportunities is to prioritize a closer proximity of universities and the scientific world to public food policy. This is possible and can achieve important results. A clear example is the political and academic work of the Observatory of the Right to Food in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In economic news, our message is: there is no reason for increases in food prices, outside the normal seasonal cycles for each country.

On the other hand, it is important to pay attention to the possible options in trade and tax policy measures that can be taken and their impact, and, in turn, work together to create a favourable environment for food trade.

This virus does not respect borders and every individual attempt to combat it will fail. Right now our greatest antidote is international cooperation and solidarity among countries.

We appreciate the efforts of FAO, the Latin American Parliament and the Caribbean (PARLATINO) and the cooperation agencies of Spain and Mexico that, despite the current situation we are facing as humanity, have maintained their great support.

We are about 500 legislators from over 20 countries in the region, which have been fighting for the eradication of hunger and malnutrition for 10 years, and today we make ourselves available for national, regional and international efforts to address this global disease.

We have long been working with the cooperation of PARLATINO and sub-regional parliaments, and multiple actors outside the region, including the Parliament of Spain, the European Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament and the International Organization of Parliaments (IPU); experience which allows us to exchange knowledge and join forces.

Being the natural bridge between people and governments we are accountable, as parliamentarians, for creating conditions and demanding results.

Our tasks include the positioning of the issues on the public agenda, making laws, approving budgets and the oversight of policies.

Finally, we invite everyone to act with responsibility and solidarity, and strictly follow the instructions of national and international health authorities.

A Latin American and Caribbean free from hunger, malnutrition and coronavirus is possible ...Working together we will get ahead!

Parliamentary Front against Hunger of Latin America and the Caribbean

