

# Voices from Venezuelan civil society demand an urgent mechanism of social and political agreement to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic

Voices from Venezuela's civil society call on political actors to work on a solution that allows for the articulation of means necessary to deal with the humanitarian emergency, aggravated by the pandemic, beyond the management of the political conflict. This is especially true given COVID-19's progress and its consequences on the lives of Venezuelans, which demand immediate measures to rebuild the institutional capacities of the Venezuelan State in order to assist and protect the population.

Venezuela is facing this pandemic in the midst of a complex humanitarian emergency. Understanding this context and the country's structural weaknesses to face the health and human emergency that is upon us propels us to demand from the political actors responsible for leading the State and the National Assembly, as well as social and political sectors, to assume the historic responsibility of opening paths that allow for the adoption of urgent, effective and necessary measures to preserve the lives of the vulnerable majority of the population to the serious impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on such situation, we make the following recommendations:

1. Framing all actions with respect and guaranteeing the human rights of the population, understanding that assistance alone is insufficient if it does not provide protection.
2. Creating a dialogue mechanism between the interdisciplinary teams composed of both political actors and a Civil Society Advisory Council, which will include experts appointed without ideological-political considerations, belonging to the following fields: health, nutrition, economy, and community organizations, to move forward together with multilateral organizations in the coordination of the national response to COVID-19 with support from all sectors.
3. Providing all available resources so that the necessary medical care is accessible to all sectors of the population, especially vulnerable low-income communities, children and adolescents, women, the elderly, people with disabilities, indigenous communities in cities and remote areas and people in prisons and detention centers.
4. Taking all possible measures to protect workers in the health sector, who must be provided with all the supplies, equipment and conditions necessary to carry out their work under the current circumstances.

5. Guaranteeing the issuance of safe-passage letters and fuel supply to transporters of food, medicines and medical supplies in order to protect suppliers, as well as health personnel, humanitarian actors and human rights advocates, mass media personnel and people with chronic health conditions who must receive treatment at health facilities.
6. Managing the cases of people who remain in transportation terminals inside and outside Venezuela without resources and relocation possibilities.
7. Coordinating the actions of the National Armed Forces and other law enforcement agencies, as well as civil protection and firefighters, according to the recommendations issued by the teams of experts managing the response, including their adherence to international standards of respect for human rights. Prohibiting the intervention of armed civilian groups in tasks related to public order.
8. Guaranteeing unrestricted access to public information and allowing the free media, as well as facilitating means of protection for media staff, in order to guarantee the population's right to information.
9. Designating the Ministry of Health as the authoritative institution to inform on health issues related to the pandemic, so it will regularly report on the challenges and progress of decisions and actions, by public and private means, in open and periodic addresses.
10. Incorporating policies to guarantee public services and livelihoods for the entire population, with a special focus on the most vulnerable sectors, such as informal and self-employed workers, older adults, retirees and pensioners, salaried workers whose monthly salary does not cover the cost of basic goods and services and people in a state of poverty, people who are homeless, who do not count with accumulated resources to remain in isolation for long periods of time.
11. Addressing with extreme urgency the needs for health, water and hygiene of inmates, as well as the specific needs of those who are ill, women and minors in prisons and detention centers, in addition to reducing the number of prisoners through humanitarian measures for those who are in particularly vulnerable conditions and are not in danger, and to release all those arbitrarily imprisoned or detained for political reasons.
12. The benefits of these measures must be distributed through universal mechanisms, without any discrimination by affiliation that places conditions on the beneficiaries. A mechanism should be considered for people without bank accounts and it should be taken into account that there is a high percentage of individuals, especially the elderly, who do not have debit cards. Likewise, home support groups must be created and activated to identify and provide assistance to the elderly living on their own or to people with disabilities.
13. Guaranteeing absolute priority in access to public policies, programs and services for children and adolescents. In particular, it is essential to ensure the operation of the system for the protection of children and

adolescents in accordance with the provisions of the Organic Law for the Protection of Children and Adolescents, as well as to establish a structured and viable proposal to guarantee access to education, taking into account the difficulties to access the internet and other communication platforms. Parents and caregivers must be adequately oriented to accompany children and adolescents in this process.

14. Recognizing the United Nations' Humanitarian Country Mechanism deployed under the solid principles of Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality and Operational Independence, as an institutional space shared by the political actors, to channel the implementation and control of urgent projects to care for the population in the midst of the pandemic. This would imply opening a space of cooperation between both political actors with the participation of the international community in which sectors of Venezuelan civil society could collaborate as guarantors of compliance.

We call on all Venezuelan sectors, the International Community and Multilateral Organizations, sister civil society organizations from other countries, important actors, and especially the governments of Norway, Canada, the United States, the European Union, governments of Latin America and the Caribbean, Russia, China and Cuba, to demand, support and accompany these humanitarian and political agreements in favor of the Venezuelan people.

Caracas, April 4th, 2020.