

CAMPAIGN PAPER

ALL HEROES FOR HEALTH

**ONLY
FIGHTERS
WIN**





Viva Salud fights for the right to health worldwide. To achieve this, we adhere to our key values: social justice, solidarity, activism and sovereignty.



UNITED IN THE STRUGGLE FOR HEALTH

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ALL HEROES FOR HEALTH

WHILE THE CORONA CRISIS IS AFFECTING ALL OF US, ITS IMPACT IS NOT THE SAME FOR EVERYONE. THE CORONAVIRUS HAS EXPOSED EXISTING INEQUALITIES IN OUR SOCIETY AND IS AUGMENTING THEM.

Health workers, blue-collar workers and marginalized groups are exposed to far bigger infection risks and to higher mortality rates. It is evident our health systems cannot guarantee the right to health for everyone.

In their efforts to ease the pressure on hospitals and health workers and to restrain the pandemic, governments are taking drastic measures. Without respecting secure distance, hand hygiene and mouth masks, many more lives would be endangered and the pandemic's impact would be much bigger.

But in some countries these measures put human rights under strain. Some governments are curtailing democratic freedom for an undetermined time and deploy drastic measures to impose quarantine rules.

A number of governments is also using the corona crisis against social movements and human rights defenders. They exclude social organizations from decision making, criminalize protests, impede vital humanitarian work and activists fall victim to police violence.

All this comes at a time when we need social movements more than ever as the health of billions of people is in danger. The impact of the corona crisis will be felt for years to come and will be distributed

unevenly in society. Social movements play an important role in verifying the impact is dealt with in a socially just manner.

If we are to guarantee the right to health for all and want to live in a healthier, more ecological and socially just post-corona society, we need to give social movements the space to play their role. They need to be able to inform citizens and mobilize them, stimulate protests and solidarity, formulate political demands and control and criticize governments.

That is why we are launching our 'Only Fighters Win' campaign to support these social movements.

The healthcare heroes are not alone. They have the support of social movements from different sectors. All heroes for health. A global health crisis can only be resolved through international cooperation. We therefore, via this campaign, urge the Belgian government to keep investing in international solidarity. This will allow social

movements across the world to continue their struggle for health, strong public healthcare and social justice. Because only those who fight can win. They are all heroes of health. Only fighters win! 🇵🇧



"The healthcare heroes are not alone. They have the support of social movements from different sectors."





Nearly 100 million people risk extreme poverty due to medical expenses.

Around 800 million people

spend 10%

of their budget on health expenses.

(The average for a Belgian household is 4.6%).

WHILE MANY DEMAND A RETURN TO BUSINESS AS USUAL, THE CORONA PANDEMIC SHOWS US THE NEED TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY. RADICALLY DIFFERENT. THE CORONA CRISIS EXPOSES THE INABILITY OF OUR HEALTH SYSTEMS TO GUARANTEE THE RIGHT TO HEALTH.



THE RIGHT TO HEALTH IN DANGER

Politicians, economists, journalists and opinion makers pleading for a swift return to the 'old normal' are overlooking one crucial problem. We would never have ended up in this crisis without the pre-corona society. The coronavirus has not so much broken society, it has shown us how broken society already was.

Failing health systems

Most countries were hardly prepared for a pandemic, despite outbreaks of variations of coronavirus and repeated warnings from the World Health Organization and scientists. Hospitals and health centres worldwide are struggling to cope with waves of infections. ►

Half of the world's population doesn't have access to essential health services.

Health workers are performing double shifts and stocks of face masks, test kits and respiratory equipment are or were often insufficient.

This should not surprise us. Many governments have been dismantling public healthcare for decades. Budget cuts and privatization have made them unable to launch large scale prevention campaigns and have limited options to expand health services in crisis situations. The quality of healthcare also went down.

Uneven impact

Unequal access to quality healthcare aside, a range of other factors cause the coronavirus and corona measures to hit some harder than others.

Inequality in housing, labour conditions, education, ethnicity, gender, access to water and food or quality healthcare make some groups in society more vulnerable to the virus. Blue-collar workers, people ▶



At the start of March, the DRC had around 70 respiratory devices available for 95 million people.



Failing health system in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Congo has to deal with the coronavirus while its health system is on the brink of collapse and other health crises like cholera, measles, Ebola and malaria keep ravaging the country. Mass migration, high malnutrition rates and poor access to essential services all contribute to aggravate the situation.



"The government here doesn't inform the population on simple hygiene measures such as avoiding to shake hands, social distancing or regularly washing hands. That's why we go from door to door with our community health activists. There is no money, but what we can do is raise awareness."

Billy Mangwaza Étoile du Sud, partner of Viva Salud in DR Congo

living in poverty or marginalized groups such as homeless people, prisoners or people seeking refuge are much more at risk of being infected or of dying as a result of a coronavirus infection.

The same goes for the impact of the quarantine measures. How do you maintain social distance when sharing a room with seven people? And how do you put food on the table when you work in the informal sector and lose your income overnight? The figures speak

volumes. About 40% of the global population do not have access to water or soap at home. Around 60% of the labour force have no social protection.

The coronavirus has not hit a resilient and healthy society, it has hit one where broad layers of the population are deprived of social and economic basic rights. Rather than a public health crisis, the corona crisis is a social crisis and increasingly a crisis of democracy. 🗣️



"One of the groups most frequently transmitting COVID-19 on the West Bank are Palestinian workers working in Israel or the illegal colonies. Their working conditions are very bad and they have no protection."

Shatha Odeh

director Health Work Committees,
partner of Viva Salud in Palestine



Palestine: double lockdown in Gaza

In the Gaza Strip, the corona pandemic is forcing a double lockdown on the population. Three military invasions and a suffocating Israeli blockade have seriously weakened the health system.

- 📍 2 intensive care beds per 100.000 people (Belgium had 18 per 100.000 people at the start of the pandemic)
- 📍 97 respiratory devices for 2,1 million people



The Cuban approach

Despite the US blockade, Cuba has one of the best health systems in the world. Prevention, accessibility and trust are central. Care is free of charge and a network of doctors closely monitors the health situation throughout the country. Everyone is called for a general checkup once a year. As they trust the system, people don't hesitate to go to their local health centre. During the corona pandemic, risk patients were paid daily visits by their doctor, volunteers or medical students.



LEARN MORE

- ➔ Report 'Why public healthcare is better'
- ➔ Video 'The right to health in the Philippines and Cuba'





“This is the time for stronger unity and cooperation”

When the government imposed lockdown in March, we were caught by surprise. All our activities and programs were suspended. We wondered how to help the community and the workers during quarantine. Blue-collar workers were not entitled to any support. Only the unemployed and people living in slums are considered poor. But workers have also lost their jobs. Together they can press for a global solution to this crisis. This is the time for stronger unity and cooperation.

Amy Dumupoy
program coordinator at Caritas Novaliches



"Shooting, detaining, or abusing someone for breaking a curfew because they are desperately searching for food is clearly an unacceptable and unlawful response."

Michelle Bachelet
United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights



MANY GOVERNMENTS HAVE TAKEN DRASTIC MEASURES IN ORDER TO TACKLE THE CORONA PANDEMIC. BUT THESE CAN JEOPARDIZE HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRACY.

A FIGHT AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS OR AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS?

Governments everywhere have 'declared war' to the coronavirus. We can see this from their tough stance to the pandemic. Never before have governments across the world imposed so many restrictive measures at the same time. Various countries declared a state of emergency and one third of the world's population had some form of quarantine imposed.

Not prepared for a pandemic of this kind, some governments saw no alternative to imposing emergency laws and extraordinary measures. This has put pressure on the democratic space and a number of fundamental basic rights.

Lockdown for human rights

A number of countries have opted for a tough approach to the pandemic. Instead of informing their citizens on the dangers of the coronavirus and organizing social measures like food help or financial support, some governments enforce restrictive measures through repression, privacy violations, disproportionate sanctions and increased militarization. Some countries impose new forms of technological surveillance through smartphone apps or experiment with face recognition systems.

In other countries police and military are using excessive and sometimes deadly violence when imposing lockdown or curfew measures. Human rights organizations are reporting arbitrary arrests, intimidation and humiliating sanctions. In Europe as well as Asia, Africa, North and South America citizens have fallen victim to human rights violations. The United Nations have warned of a 'toxic lockdown culture'.

In the Philippines, our partners Karapatan, Gabriela and Council for Health and Development have sounded the alarm as early as mid-March, denouncing president Duterte's devastating approach. He declared the state of emergency for a 6-month period and sent out the army and police to control the population's quarantine.

This is how Roneo Clamor, deputy secretary-general at Karapatan sees the situation: "Millions and millions of pesos are being spent on the intelligence services and the so-called war on drugs while investments in public health and basic social services are being cut."

Rather than making choices to protect the population, like the distribution of face masks or support for impacted workers, the measures some governments take only put their citizens in danger. 🧢



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AT THE VERY MOMENT THE RIGHTS OF MANY PEOPLE ARE UNDER PRESSURE, THE WORK OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IS COMPROMISED.

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE LINE OF FIRE

While social movements and human rights defenders in some countries have had to cope with repression for a long time already, this trend has worsened during the pandemic. Countries with authoritarian leaders and big income gaps take advantage of the situation to obstruct or prevent the important work of trade unions, human rights organizations and other social movements. The situation is not the same everywhere, but we see some general trends.

Violence is on the rise

Violence against human rights defenders and representatives of social movements has not decreased. In Colombia's first lockdown week alone, six activists, including a woman and two indigenous leaders, were murdered in cold blood by armed groups linked with illegal mining and logging. In the first half of 2020, over 100 activists have been killed. In 2019 the total number was 120. In the Philippines as well violence is ►

continuing. Activists and socio-cultural workers are subjected to intimidation, bullying, false accusations, unlawful arrests, kidnappings and even murder.

Excluded from decision-making

In many places social movements are being excluded from decision-making. While the pandemic requires effective action in many domains, governments are hesitant to accept guidance from social movements with expertise in the field. Representatives of women's movements, trade unions, environmental organizations or minority groups are given few opportunities to participate in the debate of the corona crisis approach. Urgent issues such as labour conditions, domestic violence, climate change, the needs of low-income groups, marginalized communities or workers risk being neglected altogether.

Freedom of speech and access to information under pressure

Some governments have gone as far as limiting free speech and access to information. They declare laws allowing them to penalize criticism of their approach or, under the banner of fighting 'misinformation' on the corona pandemic, reduce the room for debate and attack critical voices. In various places across the world citizens and activists have been arrested for allegedly spreading false information, causing 'insecurity' or sharing satire on social media endangering 'national unity'.

At a time when governments should be transparent and accountable, some have held back important information, like the number of infections or the post-pandemic recovery plans. This makes it harder for



On 17 August 2020, Zara Alvarez, health and human rights activist was brutally murdered due to her social commitment. Like many other Filipino human rights defenders her name appeared on a list of alleged terrorists.



The Philippines introduce anti-terror law

On July 3rd, Philippine president Rodrigo Duterte signed a brutal law allowing him to label any criticism of his policies as terrorism. The anti-terror law can punish anyone in the country campaigning for human rights or against social inequality. The law is Duterte's latest newest attack on the already very weak Philippine democracy and reaffirms a deeply rooted practice in Philippine law: criminalization of activism. But our partners won't be deterred. They are joining human rights organizations, journalists and lawyers in stepping up in the fight.



"In the middle of a public health crisis, the government is exploiting its emergency powers not to combat the pandemic but to brutally stifle dissent and flatten the curve of brewing social discontent."

Cristina Palabay

Secretary-General of Karapatan,
partner of Viva Salud in the Philippines

social movements to critically respond to policies and propose alternatives.

Freedom of movement curtailed

Restrictions in freedom of movement also make crucial aspects of social movements' work impossible. Lockdowns may cause the link between social movements and the communities they work with to partially dilute. Gatherings, trainings and meetings are being held online or are being cancelled. This makes it tougher for movements to develop a joint strategy and mobilize, empower and train their constituency.

Certain countries have also used restrictions in freedom of movement to frustrate humanitarian aid. Aid workers and volunteers for example risk prison

sentences for breaking social distancing rules when distributing food, face masks or hand gel. Curfews and restrictions on leaving home sometimes make it hard for social movements and humanitarian organizations to offer help to those heavily impacted by the crisis.

Finally, the right to peaceful protest has clearly been affected. While limitations on large gatherings are understandable when containing a contagious virus, we may wonder why workers in non-essential areas have been forced to continue working in sometimes unsafe circumstances, when trade unions defending their rights were prevented from being heard in circumstances that would arguably have been safer? 🙄



Philippine humanitarian workers arrested

Even though they had the local authorities' permission for a food distribution, Philippine police arrested ten volunteers, including seven jeepney drivers, two teachers and a volunteer working for women's movement Gabriela on May 1st. The arrests were made in Marikina, in the Manila metropolitan area.



The COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker indicates 41 countries have restricted freedom of speech.





8 big food multinationals were able to pay 18 billion dollars dollars in dividends to their shareholders in the first half of 2020.

This is ten times the amount the UN states it needs to save people from famine. The World Food Agency estimates that by the end of 2020 6.000 to 12.000 people may die from hunger as a consequence of the corona.

Source: Oxfam International



THE CORONA PANDEMIC IS NOT JUST A CRISIS, IT ALSO PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD A HEALTHY SOCIETY. TO MAKE SURE THIS HAPPENS, WE NEED SOCIAL MOVEMENTS WITH SPACE TO PLAY THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY.

ALL TOGETHER FOR A HEALTHY SOCIETY

Disasters and crises always pose a challenge. They shake up society and take political certainties down. Some governments take advantage of the population's uncertainty to broaden the gap between poor and rich. Still, a crisis may also offer perspective to build a healthy, social, just and sustainable future. This also goes for today's crisis.

Various problems, one struggle

The corona pandemic has exposed the links between various problems in our society. The causes and consequences of the corona crisis can't be dissociated from the catastrophic consequences of budget cuts and privatizations in healthcare, the climate crisis, the social inequality growing year after year and the racism so deeply rooted in our society. This makes the struggle for the right to health a struggle for social justice and climate justice too.

This provides opportunities for building a counter force. Alongside trade unions, climate, women's and anti-racism movements, health activists can put structural change on the agenda and enforce social justice. ►



People's Health Movement

Since 2000, Viva Salud is involved in the People's Health Movement (PHM), a worldwide movement of activists, health organizations and academic institutions committed to the right to health.

PHM is an important international voice in the fight for strong primary healthcare and a comprehensive vision on health. With other movements, it has seized the corona crisis to expose the global links between our health, climate, racism and economy. It also casts a critical eye on the World Health Organization's policies through WHO Watch. PHM proposes alternatives in a constructive contribution to international health policy.



We will also need these joint forces at international level. The coronavirus disregards country borders. The answer to global problems will need to be a global one. Even if institutions like the World Health Organization are far from perfect, they are vital in efficiently addressing the next pandemic.



Solidarity as the answer

The coronavirus did not only bring doom and gloom. Local and international solidarity initiatives were set up everywhere. Local committees support elderly people in their neighbourhoods, people help each other do their shopping, we applaud healthcare workers. We also saw international solidarity. At the end of March, Cuba sent 52 doctors to Northern Italy to support hospitals and China shipped medical supplies to other parts of the world to help resolve shortages.

Our partners in Congo, the Philippines, Palestine and Cuba are also fully committed to the communities they work with. In Palestine, youth movements handed out flyers explaining what to do to stop the virus from spreading, they distributed hygiene kits and food packages, help disinfect the streets, offer help to those most affected by the crisis and call elderly people and patients of local health centres to check if they are doing alright. In Congo, our partners organized their health activists to spread prevention messages from door to door and collect protective material.

Who is paying for this crisis?

In a bid to tackle the challenges this crisis poses, many governments throw their austerity dogmas overboard. While we have been told for years there was no money, billions of euros are now being made available to reduce the pandemic's impact. European Union member states are free to ignore the strict budgetary and debt norms, nationalization of companies is being considered left and right and, amid pressure from health workers, the Belgian government invested 1 billion euros in the healthcare sector. Investments in strong public healthcare and social security are vital if we are to overcome this crisis.

Financial support from the government however does not imply there will be no budget cuts or social disasters any more or that the strongest shoulders will carry the burden of the corona crisis' costs. The 2008 financial crisis has taught us that. State intervention was temporary and mainly served the interests of multinationals and shareholders. The population was left to pay the bill.

Today's corona crisis won't automatically lead to social change and more social justice either. The consequences of the corona pandemic will be felt for years. Without the involvement and struggle of social movements its impact will only increase and the bill will end up in the hands of ordinary citizens again. We can only achieve a healthy society by struggling for it together.

Invest in international solidarity



The virus knows no frontiers. This makes international solidarity and support a necessity and not just an option. This is a task for both social movements and our government.

We therefore urge the Belgian government to keep investing in international solidarity so social movements can continue their fight for the right to health, strong public healthcare and social justice.

If we are to build a socially just society from this crisis, it will only be done by giving social movements the space to play their important role. They need everyone's support to do this. 🙌



JOIN IN AND STAY INFORMED

-  www.vivasalud.be
-  www.facebook.com/vivasaludbe
-  www.instagram.com/vivasaludbe



MAKE A DONATION

Support the work of the heroes of health through a donation. This will help our partners in the Philippines, Palestine and Congo to keep enforcing social movements.

- ➔ Make a donation on Viva Salud's account number
BE15 0010 4517 8030
(communication: donation OFW)
- ➔ Support online at:
<https://actions.vivasalud.be>



STRENGTHEN THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Become a member of a solidarity movement like intal (www.intal.be) or Cubanismo (www.cubanismo.be), join a trade union to safeguard the social rights of all or become active in the People's Health Movement to strengthen international solidarity bonds for the struggle for the right health (<https://phmovement.org>).

