Putting the Most Vulnerable First

GCAP Statement on the Coronavirus emergency

1. The world is facing a global emergency affecting people and countries with no distinctions. In this particular time the Global Call for Action against Poverty (GCAP), with all its National Coalitions and Constituency Groups all over the world, wants to share its concerns and solidarity with all the people suffering from the coronavirus pandemic, and with all the communities struggling against the outbreak. Our political motto is “Stand Together” to struggle for justice, against poverty and inequalities. Today we want to stand together with those who are suffering, with victim’s families, and with all the affected communities. We also want to share a special thanks to all the people working to stop the outbreak, in the health systems and in all other fundamental services, and to the people assisting those who are in need.

2. GCAP is active in promoting Sustainable Development in the framework of the UN Agenda 2030 with a special attention on condemning and reducing inequalities. Our main commitment since 2016 has been the Faces of Inequality Campaign, where all our National Coalitions and Constituency Groups work to show all kinds of inequalities in their countries and locally, creating spaces to make people raising their voices in order to make the slogan “Leave No One Behind” real. In this emergency we are aware of the dangers faced by the most vulnerable. People and groups that ordinarily live in challenging situations are even more vulnerable in this emergency. There is a special concern for the Global South, where health systems and public institutions have limited opportunities and resources to face emergencies. We need strong solidarity all over the world within and among communities and nations.

   We call on governments and parliaments to take special and effective initiatives, putting the most vulnerable first. In this emergency, vulnerable groups like refugees, indigenous people, homeless people, persons with disabilities, people discriminated by work and descent and elderly people need to get the same protection as others. We want to sustain our National Coalitions and all civil society organizations and groups of citizens working - often on a voluntary basis - to assist those in danger in this special time. We support the work of civil society at local and national levels to act concretely and to dialogue with governments in order to provide necessary assistance to people.

3. This crisis shows how universal public health systems are fundamental for the life of all countries. We call on governments to take initiatives to radically strengthen public health systems, in order to guarantee universal free access. Health is a fundamental Human Right and has to be put in place in a real way, not just proclaimed with empty declarations. Too many people all over the world have no access to public assistance and can't afford the cost of intensive care when needed or, worse, face a lack of people rising to end inequalities.
technical facilities, as still happens in too many areas of the world. Consequently, we call for immediate actions to **strengthen public health systems** and to maintain them actively after the end of the crisis in order to work towards **universal access** to high-quality public health systems on a permanent basis. Similar permanent support has to be radically improved and implemented for **public scientific research** to promote treatments and vaccines and to strengthen the capability of health systems to react to similar pandemic crises.

It’s not just a matter of governments at the national level. A **global initiative** to manage public health crises as a global issue, in solidarity and with co-responsibility, is needed.

4. **Fast and adequate initiatives have to be taken beyond the medical response.** There is a need to reduce the speed of the outbreak and to guarantee, now and in the future, adequate living standards. Many countries have opted for lockdowns and quarantines. But we have to remember that the large majority of the **disadvantaged population** in the world (especially urban) live in crowded settlements, making it impossible to ensure physical distancing, and hence, could be the most prone to community infections. Experts and governments across the world should consider this challenge and work out **solutions that can work for communities where families live in close proximity**, including taking over vast public spaces to accommodate the homeless and those with inadequate housing with facilities provided.

Furthermore, it’s very important to provide **income support**, facilities for **debt management** and even **access to food** to households. Smartwork is ‘smart’, indeed, but a lot of jobs can’t be done from home: taxi drivers, small traders, workers from the informal sector are paying a higher cost from the crisis. They are **losing their livelihoods**, and this pushes people into penury, starvation and indebtedness.

5. **This emergency shows the importance of functional and accountable governments** and how the provision of **public financial resources** has to be **fast, adequate, effective and transparent**.

We need daring initiatives to provide governments with liquidity and **resources for income support**, avoiding negative feedback that could come from non-coordinated action. We need a special initiative to **reduce the burden of external debt**, that is affecting too many countries, limiting their possibility to finance innovative investments. We need also special monitoring of **international trade** in order to make the provision of necessary goods possible now, but also to **provide a fair flow of goods tomorrow, when the crisis will be over**.

6. **Fast deliver and stop corruption.** We must ensure **quick procurement of emergency supplies, equipment and other vital resources** and urgently create **new health facilities** to provide a timely response to those in need. Corruption has to be stopped in the procurement processes by installing **pre- and post-audit transparency measures** and public reporting. There is **no excuse for corruption**, 7.
even when an emergency is creating a general demand for extraordinary and fast procedures.

If needed, governments should take into consideration requisition and nationalization of private health facilities in order to speed up delivery assistance. Moreover, we need international standards for public procurement during these crises.

8. A fundamental role has to be played by local communities and their leaders, like mayors. In many countries, we are seeing mayors able to animate citizens and coordinate the effort to prevent and protect. Delegating power to the community level is fundamental to making them resilient and to preserving the role of citizens as active members of their communities, instead of considering them as servants who have to obey orders.

Local governments bear a big responsibility to respond directly to the challenges of containing the spread of the Coronavirus, provide safety nets for its local constituents, and ensure access to medical care for the infected. Now when most countries are on lockdowns, local governments and communities must work together to ensure proper and timely responses are in place to attend to emergencies including food, water and sanitation.

9. Health is a fundamental Human Right. We all have to share the effort to guarantee it, but we must not forget the full complex of Human Rights. The dignity of every single human being can’t be violated, even in this health emergency. Here as well, the risk of violating democratic principles and freedoms can be high. We call governments to make all decisions to limit freedom of people through transparent democratic processes and to rigorously limit the monitoring of personal data to only required information to combat the outbreak.

10. The emergency we are facing is an opportunity to also remember that high risks are faced every day by an enormous number of marginalised people. Millions of people suffer from hunger, ebola, malaria, diarrhoea and other diseases, violence, and war. The solidarity we will be able to build up to face this outbreak has to be maintained and used, today and tomorrow, to face all these other humiliating emergencies, even if they are affecting people with no voice.

11. We call on governments to show their commitment to put in place fast, adequate, effective and transparent action to protect the lives of everyone starting with the most vulnerable.

We call everybody to share those commitments to strengthen our capability to overcome the crisis and to Stand Together, today and tomorrow, to build a better safe and sustainable world, fighting inequalities, working for peace and justice and capable of recognising and protecting the beauty and dignity of human life for all.