**Hungry people can’t stop Coronavirus**

The diminution of land used to produce food crops, the lack of policies supporting food production, the many ways in which subsidies promote and support agribusinesses, the lack of border controls, the lack of food safety controls, more than 840 thousand people suffering hunger[[1]](#footnote-1), and almost two million more at risk regarding food security[[2]](#footnote-2), are the main aspects we can use to describe the realities of Paraguay, made it worse nowadays by the pandemic.

Since the national government launched social isolation initial measures on March 11, the main supermarket chains started a frantic speculative race of price raising, up to 200%.[[3]](#footnote-3) No more food is arriving from Brazil; according to Rodolfo Friedman, the minister of agriculture, at least 95% of the demand for horticultural produce is supplied by Argentinian imports.[[4]](#footnote-4) In Argentina there are also significant price increases[[5]](#footnote-5), caused by –besides speculation- the logistic obstacles created by the restrictions imposed to confront the pandemic.

Friedman already spoke publicly exempting the supermarket owners of any responsibility of the situation.[[6]](#footnote-6) Being the top authority regarding the agro production of the country, then he must know who is responsible for the fact that in our country only 10 importers control 51% of the tomato market[[7]](#footnote-7) and 82% of the imported peppers.[[8]](#footnote-8) This dependency of an oligopoly –that seldom follows the law- makes even more acute the risk of food scarcity. Friedman must also know how it is possible that a country with such extraordinary richness in food production since the beginning of its history, with plenty of rich soil, water, and sun, it is so far away from food security.

Another social force that made “reassuring” statements aimed to the general population is the Cámara de Alimentos y Bebidas de Paraguay (CABE), the Chamber of Food and Drinks of Paraguay, formed by the following companies: Nestlé, Arcor, Pepsico, Bebidas del Paraguay SA, Coca-Cola Paresa, and Unilever. The chamber stated that they “guarantee the supply of provisions for the population in a safe and efficient manner”. The national government, represented by the minister of Industry and Commerce Liz Cramer celebrated that statement.

With 71% of informal employment[[9]](#footnote-9), and an economy of “self-ownership” (euphemism for unemployed people who subsist with odd jobs, without any social security net) that could represent more the 40% of the GDP[[10]](#footnote-10), is not difficult to project that a great number of families are today isolated without any resources to obtain basic food staples and therefore to secure their survival. The proposed distribution of money (500,000 Guaranies per family, around 80 dollars) is an offense to the Paraguayan people. This amount of money is enough to feed a family of five for two weeks at the most. But the offense becomes an insult when we know that the distribution will be done by cell phone, since only the big supermarket chains will receive these funds, along with the phone providers that “generously” will only charge a commission to the supermarket companies.

This scenario evidently shows the truth in the many warnings already posted by social organizations regarding the risk of famine. So far, the recent measures show that our national leaders are incapable of fulfilling the provisions of our Constitution, that establishes the Government’s duty to secure the basic needs of the population. Besides, they lack the minimum social sensibility that leaders should have, and even worse, that they are serving the interests of the companies and oligarchs.

Given the extreme seriousness of the current situation:

* We denounce that the coronavirus pandemic unfolds over a reality of social inequality created by the governmental option of favoring an unacceptable social model, among the most unjust in the world, that propels the implementation of an unsustainable productive system, based on deforestation, contaminations, exclusion of millions of citizens, and that is particularly prejudicial to women and children, especially peasants and indigenous people.
* We demand the urgent application of measures that emphasize human life and dignity and make them the center of public decisions and policies, prioritizing the Human Right to Adequate Food and Nutrition, trying to reach food security and aiming to regain our food independence.
* We propose:
	+ The immediate implementation of the recommendations included in the Global Strategic Framework Food Security and Nutrition from the Committee on World Food Security (FAO/UN)[[11]](#footnote-11).
	+ Immediate suspension of all judicial processes on land ownership, and of eviction processes that impede the right to the land to small family owners and indigenous communities, right guaranteed by the Constitution and agrarian laws.
	+ Creation of departmental and municipal committees to fight hunger and promote food production, with participation of the Council of Health, social issues offices, and civil organizations in-situ, to allow for immediate responses to starving families.
	+ Continuation of the Paraguay School Food Program PAEP, including direct food distribution to the families in the educational community.
	+ Immediate implementation of the National Program of Horticultural Production presented by the National Peasant Federation to national authorities, to start the road toward our food-sovereignty.
	+ Immediate implementation of a program for multiplication of native and local seeds, especially the species more important for the national diet (maize, beans, peanuts, manioc), to rescue the native genetic patrimony.
	+ Establishment of a policy of price control of the basic food basket, providing subsidies if necessary.
	+ Funding these measures by retentions to soybean exports; taxes to tobacco, alcohol, and sugary drinks; higher taxes to the financial sector, and the suspension of payments to the public debt, to avoid the unnecessary increase of the country external debt.
	+ Guarantying the salary of our workers, respecting their earned rights such as paid leave and vacations, through the establishment of the necessary agreements between public and private enterprises with the State.

Signed: Centro de Estudios Heñói; Federación Nacional Campesina - FNC; Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas e Indígenas - Conamuri; Cultiva Py; Dra. Stela Benítez Leite; Ticio Escobar; Clyde Soto Badaui; Base IS; Hugo Migliore; Asociación Oñoiru; Servicio de Educación y Desarrollo Humano Integral – SEDHI; Serpaj Py; Decidamos; Asociación de Mujeres campesinas y populares de Caaguazu - AMUCAP; Coordinadora de Organizaciones Sociales de Repatriación - COSOR; Asociación Oñondivepa; Sociedad de Economía Política del Paraguay (SEPPY); Centro de Estudios Rurales Interdisciplinarios – CERI; Sindicato de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales – SITRAFACSO; Iniciativa Amotocodie

1. FAO, FIDA, UNICEF, PMA y OMS. 2018. El estado de la seguridad alimentaria y la nutrición en el mundo. Fomentando la resiliencia climática en aras de la seguridad alimentaria y la nutrición. FAO, Roma [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Prevalence of undernourishment in the general population: 11,2%. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.ultimahora.com/suben-precios-frutihorticolas-y-el-mag-culpa-los-proveedores-n2876492.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.ultimahora.com/ingresan-mas-frutas-y-verduras-y-precios-se-normalizan-dice-el-mag-n2876871.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.pagina12.com.ar/255095-por-que-aumentaron-la-fruta-verdura-y-hortalizas-tanto-en-ta [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.ultimahora.com/hay-suba-argentina-pero-no-justifica-200-recargo-supermercados-segun-importador-n2876475.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 10 biggest importers of tomatoes in 2018: Cipriano Contreras Caballero; Julio César Ruda Benítez; Guido Ernesto González Giménez; Nicolasa Alfonso Pesoa; Antolina Ramona Rolón; Herrera Agrocomercial; Eladio Figueredo; Feliciano Villasboa; Adalberto Franco Gil; Pirareta Py Import Export. Source: Senave. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 10 biggest importers of peppers in 2018: Sanchez Comercial Import Export SA; César Osvaldo Pineda; Cármen González; Fruterías y verdulerías Dos Amigos; Gladys Manuela Espínola Pereira; Cándido Arce Caballero; Pirareta Py Import Export; Víctor Sosa Villalba; Cipriano y César Contreras Caballero. Source: Senave. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Banco Mundial, La naturaleza cambiante del trabajo. 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.5dias.com.py/2019/11/economia-informal-mueve-us-16-mil-millones/ [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. www.fao.org/3/MR173EN/mr173en.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-11)