

IfE's Pandemic Response Declaration¹

26 April 2020

1. The poorest people (some 3 billion) often have no access to hygienic protection (soap and water, other disinfectants).

- Provide free basic water and electricity services where there is an infrastructure to carry them
- Install water taps around cities where people can wash their hands easily, with provisions to prevent disease transmission through the tap heads
- Provide hygiene kits (soap, disinfectants, menstrual supplies) and masks (paper or cloth) to all who need them
- Provide daily public education via radio, visual posters and other accessible media on why and how to protect against the spread of the virus
- Urgent need for quick studies on the efficacy of washing with clean wood ashes to denature the virus (many people use ashes to wash when they do not have access to water)

2. The poorest people often cannot stay home and self-isolate – they must go out each day to find money and food.

- EITHER allow people to go out to work and find food, while making available all the protective measures described above
- OR enforce the stay-at-home rules, while delivering provisions to each family
- DO NOT enforce the stay-at-home order for people who will starve
- Use social mapping to identify those with urgent needs

3. Marginalized people are most likely to suffer human rights abuses in the enforcement of community protection orders.

- Stop issuing and enforcing impossible orders that will only lead to social tensions or deaths
- Stop discrimination and the use of violence in enforcement
- Provide everyone with the means to obey necessary restrictions
- Work with and through existing community structures to develop and enforce protection orders
- Stop spraying people with disinfectants, especially bleach: chlorine is toxic, and spraying it on people doesn't stop the virus from circulating.

4. Many poor people are losing access to food, threatening them with starvation, because of disrupted supply chains and subsequent price gouging; malnutrition limits immune response as well.

- Open up routes and borders to food and other essential supplies, even if they are closed to people
- Establish and enforce laws against price gouging or discrimination on any essential product
- Do not close food markets unless an alternate source of food is made available
- Distribute free food to all who need it, including to children who normally get their food at schools (which are now closed)

¹ <https://www.initiativeforequality.org/pandemic-response-must-build-equality-solidarity/>

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5. Poor people often have more predisposing conditions (such as disease, malnutrition or air pollution), but do not have access to adequate health care.

- Implement widespread coronavirus testing in poor communities, to identify those who need care
- Provide free health care to all
- Ensure that doctors do not engage in discriminatory rationing or denial of care for poor or marginalized people
- Continue to meet all other essential health care needs (generously defined) during the pandemic

6. Marginalized and poor people are most likely to lose their homes, jobs or other forms of income.

- Require jobs to be protected to the maximum extent possible (with paychecks to continue even if work ceases temporarily, perhaps subsidized by governments)
- Employers must not endanger workers' and their families' lives by demanding work in unsafe conditions; they must provide protective equipment, and pay for every worker to be tested for the virus; if positive, must test the family and ensure treatment
- Enforce a moratorium on housing evictions and repayment of personal debt

7. Indigenous peoples are at special risk, due to their high levels of poverty, precarious situations, low population numbers, remote locations, different cultures and languages, greater susceptibility to certain diseases, and being the targets of land and resource grabs.

- Ensure that these communities are not exposed to the virus by protecting them against all unwanted intrusions or visitors
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate explanations of the nature of the disease and how to protect against it, designed and distributed by members of the communities themselves
- Ensure that no encroachment on their land and resources takes place at any time, including during the pandemic
- Provide needed resources for these communities to meet their needs for food, housing and health care, under their own direction

8. Poor people are most susceptible to misinformation, fear, panic and trauma.

- Require all social media to stop the viral spread of misinformation on the pandemic
- Circulate strong responses to misinformation, especially those that promote fear, panic, violence, or unsafe practices
- Establish fast, accessible ways for all people to question rumors and seek accurate answers
- Establish daily radio and other accessible broadcast shows for people to hear accurate discussions by doctors and scientists
- Address emotional distress and mental illness which can be aggravated by fear and isolation
- Urgent consideration is needed for how death is handled (presence of families, bodies, rituals and burials) so that families are not traumatized

9. Rates of domestic violence against women and against children are skyrocketing during “stay at home” orders.

- Establish and strongly enforce laws against any domestic violence, including during lockdowns
- Establish safe and healthy shelters for anyone experiencing domestic violence to escape to, and circulate information on how to reach these shelters safely

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10. People in homeless encampments, shelters, prisons, detention centers, IDP camps and refugee camps are at great risk of rapidly spreading coronavirus, without adequate protection or health care.

- Provide safe shelter, food, and other necessities for the homeless
- Establish urgent policies to release all nonviolent offenders and those who are awaiting trials to serve their sentences or await trial at home
- Establish urgent policies to release everyone from migrant detention camps where they are being held involuntarily
- Provide the best health protections possible for those who are in displaced persons or refugee camps with no alternative place to live
- Establish an immediate cease-fire in every country of the world, as called for by the UN Secretary General, to alleviate the need for people to flee conflict

11. Some powerful actors are using this crisis as an excuse to circumvent rule of law and commit other abuses unrelated to coronavirus.

- Establish urgent policies and practices requiring on-line meetings of governmental bodies, broadcast to the public, so governments can function in an open and transparent way
- Establish severe penalties for any extra-legal alteration of unrelated laws, regulations, and practices during a crisis
- Civil society and journalists must pay special attention to this phenomenon and publicize it whenever it takes place

12. Governments say they do not have adequate resources to implement the recommended solutions to protect poor and marginalized people of all kinds.

- Levy an immediate surtax on very wealthy individuals and corporations to fund the coronavirus relief effort
- Provide immediate debt relief or debt forgiveness for indebted countries, to free up resources
- The need for accountability and transparency should be emphasized; establish structures to monitor transparent expenditure of COVID-19 relief funds and prosecute corrupt practices

Longer-term Measures to Ensure Healthy and Sustainable Societies

13. We must undo the damage caused by the social and economic inequalities that have laid the groundwork for the current crisis and many others, including the disempowerment of vast numbers of people, violent conflict, widespread poverty, inadequate or unaffordable health care systems, industrialized agriculture and environmental destruction that facilitate new diseases, and governments that no longer protect their citizens because they have been captured by monied interests.

- Nationalize health care systems to ensure healthcare is available for all, to gain efficiencies and reduce costs, and in order to maximize coordination during crises
- Fully fund the World Health Organization and ensure democratic oversight so it cannot be controlled by individual countries
- Remove all austerity/structural demands attached to IMF and World Bank loans, and austerity policies of other international and regional donors and governing bodies, which contribute to the destruction of the health care systems in many countries.

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- Investigate and implement the best alternatives to industrial agriculture, in order to end the documented role of food production systems in the appearance and spread of new diseases
- Investigate and implement the best practices to end ecological destruction in order to prevent the spread of new diseases – which can appear through jumping the species barrier, or spread through climate change
- Ensure democratic decision-making and equitable processes for people to choose who will represent them in the councils at the global, national and local levels, including by seating and paying committees of citizens in every country to establish budget priorities
- Eradicate poverty by providing basic income to everyone whose income is below a living standard
- Establish much more progressive tax rates to ensure meaningful redistribution through the full funding of all basic human services, including health care, education and training, basic housing, basic income, and “green” (carbon-free) public works projects for full employment
- Divert funding away from warfare and corporate subsidies, thus freeing up vast sums to address human need, alleviate suffering of all kinds, and fund the transition away from a carbon-based economy

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