



FIMARC

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FIMARC STATEMENT ON COVID 19 PANDEMIC

We, the (Bureau) members of FIMARC, express our deep concerns about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on farmers, fishers and other small food producers, rural and urban poor, daily wage and seasonal workers, migrants and unemployed people and extend our solidarity to those who affected in the crisis. The disease is spreading very rapidly everywhere and became a global problem calling for global as well as local responses.

COVID-19 has negative impacts on food production, food supply and demand, distribution, marketing and food security at all levels .Both lives and livelihoods of millions of daily wage workers, fisher folks and farm families are affected severely and at risk from this pandemic. Border closures, Lock downs, Quarantines, Trade disruptions restricting the people's access to sufficient/diverse and nutritious sources of food in most of the countries. COVID-19 lockdown means no food or work for rural and urban poor. *Millions in underdeveloped regions face penury and deprivation as economic activity grinds to a halt due to lockdown.*

Closures of local markets and less frequent grocery shopping diminish demand for fresh produce and fisheries products, affecting both producers and suppliers. They will also struggle due to higher food prices and limited purchasing power. Restrictions on tourism, closure of restaurants and café and school meals suspension would aggravate the poverty. Millions of children are already missing out their school meals they have come to rely upon. Many of them are with no formal access to social protection, including health insurance. Daily wage workers, ,seasonal workers ,migrants, the displaced, and those hit by conflicts facing extreme hunger as they do not have any source of income, support or social protection measures. Many countries announced sudden lockdowns without enforcing any measures to protect the poor and vulnerable workers living in precarious economic conditions. Developing countries are particularly at risk as COVID-19 can lead to a reduction in labour intensive forms of production (agriculture, fisheries, small business etc.).

We do not reject necessary measures such as lockdowns and other ways to protect people. However, we demand that the poor and vulnerable people, workers, small scale farmers and families do not suffer particularly hard and they should be given all necessary support needed to go through this difficult time to avoid food, economic and social crisis.

Over the years, most of the governments have implemented neoliberal economic policies that drastically cut down the public spending on health and allowed the privatization of the health services. Covid-19 exposes the catastrophic consequences of such policy decisions. In many countries, the poor and low income people are the victims of the privatized health care systems,. Many people do not disclose their infection as the cost of testing and treatments are expensive and cannot be afforded by them. This can eventually cause serious threat of community expansion of the COVID 19 and the death of millions. The self-isolation or social lockdown can cause traumatic stress, fear confusion and anger among individuals as well as an increase in domestic and family violence and thus we call upon the authorities to

provide urgent counselling, guidance and psychological support to individuals and families. FIMARC also calls for free testing and treatments for COVID patients irrespective of their income, nationality, social security or refugee status.

We fear that most governments as part of their neoliberal policies would come up with economic packages, incentives and bail out programmers to protect large scale industries, agro business and banks. We strongly oppose such a business as usual approach and call that the most vulnerable groups should be at the center of the policies to combat the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on health and the economy.

It is evident that the crisis has threatened food and other essential commodities supplies around the world and the agro-industrial food systems and transnational supermarket chains are almost paralyzed due to the trans boundary trade and transport distortions. But Small scale producer's accounts for over 70% of the food needed for the world and around 90% of food products are consumed by local communities or people within the national boundaries. We should not forget that small-scale farmers have remained central to food production, provision and distribution in all the countries even at this time of crisis through direct sales, short circuit chains, public distribution systems and available local market possibilities. Small scale food producers will continue to play their important roles by promoting an ecologically rational and socially just food system. They are still and will continue as champions and stewards of food and nutritional security of the populations even in the amidst of COVID 19 outbreak. They are the solutions and positive responses to ensure healthy food for all and should not only be a narrative of mere victims or vulnerable group during this crisis

We take this opportunity to congratulate and support the health care teams all over the world sanitation workers and other staffs, etc who takes risk of their life to combat this pandemic at the front lines. Hence we call upon the governments to provide special health and life insurance packages for these front line warriors.

We want to highlight that the COVID 19 pandemic created some valuable positive impacts for the man kind as well as for the nature. Our sky and rivers are more clearer than before, bio diversity and environment is improving, Carbon emissions and global warming is reducing, better health and hygiene habits are becoming the slogans of the day, nature is rejuvenating, excess exploitation of natural resources are diminishing, providing more time to improve our relations even in the families and to listen the call of nature. This is a time to reflect our way of life, the mode of development that we have promoted and further our relations with nature and other fellow beings. It's time to take a new road. We really need to build a new history from the lessons that we learned. Let's move together.

In this context **FIMARC demand;**

Urgent health care measures and services

- ❖ Free COVID testing must be available for everyone irrespective of their nationality including illegal migrants .It is ideal to organize the COVID testing of the maximum population and if not a rapid random testing even for those who do not show any symptoms of infection.
- ❖ Proper ,safe and adequate quarantine measures and facilities at home or hospitals should be arranged in urban and rural areas
- ❖ Take initiative to provide adequate medical equipment's, safety and hygiene materials including masks ,sanitizers and personal protection equipment (PPE) kits to all the practicing doctors and all other health care practitioners
- ❖ Government should take urgent steps to build temporary or permanent infrastructure facilities including hospitals, ventilators, ICU's and medicines to treat all the COVID patients free of charge with a special public health care budget. Nobody should be denied the testing and treatments based on their social protection status

Massive public awareness

- ❖ Massive public awareness campaigns to be held in rural as well as in urban areas about COVID 19 pandemic and the protective measures (including the wearing of masks, washing hands ,keeping personal and environmental hygiene and more over social distancing),to be taken to prevent the disease
- ❖ FIMARC and other Social movements at the grassroots should support the awareness programmes and initiatives of the governments to help the people to come out of this crisis
- ❖ Social medias and groups should not spread any false information about the COVID 19
- ❖ Mass medias should take up the moral and social role to provide true and timely information to all rather than creating fear and anxiety among the public
- ❖ All members of FIMARC should follow the lock down measures and support the containment policy of the governments.
- ❖ FIMARC members can also organize awareness campaigns(by providing hygiene materials ,preparing leaflets in local languages about the healthy habits to prevent the diseases, community support programmes) at grassroots to prevent the social expansion of the disease

Viable economic support to the most vulnerable

- ❖ Governments must provide direct cash transfers to support small scale food producers, small scale business enterprises, formal or informal workers and unemployed populations throughout the lock down and quarantine periods
- ❖ Governments must increase public spending for the boosting and restarting of economic activities with a priority given to the most vulnerable groups
- ❖ Provide advance pensions for the weaker sections of the society such as older people, disabled people, widows and other vulnerable groups
- ❖ Government must put moratorium on all the loans and credit recoveries of farmers, workers, small enterprises and all the others from private and public banks and other financial agencies
- ❖ Provide relief packages to small scale producers, start-ups and small enterprises and businesses
- ❖ Government should provide basic utilities such as water and electricity freely to all the low income groups throughout the periods of lock downs
- ❖ Better healthcare facilities to be arranged in all the prisons to avoid the spread of COVID 19
- ❖ FIMARC members are called upon to organize relief activities such as organizing food kits, essential items or sanitation materials etc to the most needed

Countries should boost their social protection programmes

- ❖ By increasing transfer amounts to help families meet their basic needs; providing complementary payments to offset loss of income by small-scale producers
- ❖ Through direct provision of food by government as well as donations from individuals, solidarity networks and non-governmental organizations;
- ❖ Injecting funds in agricultural, fisheries and small industries through grant facilities, to help food production, Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, casual laborers, and salaried staff that cannot work while all business stops.

- ❖ Promote an economic system that meets the needs of the most vulnerable populations through social safety nets, including universal basic income, free healthcare, and other social security measures

Food Production and supply

- ❖ Countries should meet the immediate food needs of their vulnerable populations.
- ❖ Countries should ensure emergency food needs are met; by adjusting and expanding social protection programmes; adjust school meal programs so as to continue delivering school meals even when schools are shut.
- ❖ Food production and transport of food ,medicines and other essential items should be declared as essential services and the movements of such items within the country or beyond the borders should not be restricted
- ❖ Government must put in place specific programmes to collect the produce directly with fair price from small scale food producers and organize specific channels and outlets for the marketing, supply and distribution
- ❖ Government should take firm measures against hoarding ,black marketing and price hike by the traders and middlemen
- ❖ Government should distribute essential food grains and other necessary materials for at least three months through public distribution programmes to all the rural and urban poor.
- ❖ Government with the help of retailers should take initiatives to promote home delivery of the food and other essential commodities to the consumers
- ❖ Promote localised, diversified food systems based on agroecology and food sovereignty

Solidarity is key for the battle against the Pandemic

- ❖ National, regional and global solidarity and cooperation is key to combat the present crisis. National and global health care systems must be re-organized for the good will of the humanity.
- ❖ Countries should share the results of the research of medicines and vaccines in real time and should not aim for profit and patenting
- ❖ Countries should share each other the excess and available medicines , masks, testing kits and other relevant information of treatments
- ❖ International and regional financial institutions should provide possible debt relief as well as unconditional loans with very low or no interest rate to developing and under developed countries to combat the pandemic and to boost their post pandemic economic activities
- ❖ UN institutions should have more coordinated and coherent approach in designing and implementing urgent short term and long term policies, programmes and projects to support the national governments to deal the present emergency crisis and eventual nation building process.

There will be enormous challenges to face as farmers, laborers and common people set out to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. There is a need for both relief and rehabilitation measures, to help the affected. Failure to act now will lead to catastrophic consequences and thus FIMARC calls upon all the governments, our member movements and other stake holders to act consciously to make a better history of mankind