



Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission  
Josep Borrell, Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Jutta Urpilainen, Commissioner for International Partnerships  
Janez Lenarčič, Commissioner for Crisis Management

Brussels, 7 April 2020

Dear President von der Leyen, Dear Vice-President, Dear Commissioners,

While the world is going through a sanitary crisis of unequalled magnitude, we, Action Against Hunger, ask for **your leadership in tackling the impacts and side effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for the most vulnerable populations** in the world.

The outbreak is challenging the whole of the European Union and the rest of the world, and we do believe that all countries have to come together to respond to this major humanitarian peril in full solidarity and humanity with and for all affected populations. The already disastrous consequences in Europe will be even more dramatic in the most fragile countries, particularly in those affected by serious humanitarian crises. The impacts of COVID-19, in the short and long term, will be multiplied for the most vulnerable populations.

**In addition to the extensive impacts on the population health, this sanitary crisis is already having disastrous socio-economic consequences.** As of today, we lack data on the exact impact of COVID-19 on undernourished individuals, however we know that undernourished people are more vulnerable to diseases, especially respiratory diseases. Meanwhile, we know from other outbreaks (such as malaria or Ebola) that population affected by those diseases were more vulnerable to undernutrition. The COVID-19 response should also take into account support mechanisms to avoid the development of hunger as lockdown measures across the globe are already threatening economic access to food and posing very serious risk in terms of food insecurity, livelihoods and social cohesion. This is why we want to firmly reaffirm **the need to implement the humanitarian and development nexus**. A global and coordinated COVID-19 response is required with both immediate and urgent multi-sectoral measures as well as longer-term action to address the socio-economic implications of the crisis on people's lives. Supporting social safety nets and strengthening health systems is also paramount to overcome the crisis.

We do believe that the EU must play a key role and reinforce its commitment by putting European solidarity in action and leading the international response. **We acknowledge the commitment of the European Commission to mitigate the effects of the crisis** and, in particular, the guidelines prepared by DG ECHO for partners on the proposed measures linked to contractual obligations, allowing the necessary degree of flexibility that will enable us to face this new challenge.

As part of the humanitarian global response, our organization would like to recall the imperative needs for all humanitarian, development and other aid organisations to benefit from **adequate support to ensure a smooth, safe and successful implementation of the response against the COVID-19 pandemic**. Many NGOs, as ours, are already setting up emergency plans, strengthening existing health systems and deploying social safety nets, even if the crisis has created serious tensions over travel, freedom of movement, shipping and supplies of medical equipment. The expertise and grounding of our organization and partners will also be necessary to support the economy and social programs in both rural and urban areas for the most vulnerable groups, when the peak of the crisis will have passed.

In line with the do no harm principle and the duty of care obligations, to which the European Commission has committed, we are encouraging you to continue to **support the most fragile countries and actors' capacities to respond to the crisis**.

In this context, we call on the EU and its Member States to:

- Support a **substantial financial commitment** and in particular to:
  - Commit additional, global and rapidly accessible financial resources for NGOs (in particular by contributing to the United Nations response plan launched on March 25);
  - Preserve all existing humanitarian response plans to guarantee the continuity of humanitarian and life-saving services for the population as diverted funding would have catastrophic impact on emergencies and the poorest and most vulnerable regions worldwide;
  - Increase Official Development Assistance not only to fund the short-term response to the sanitary crisis but also to address the long-term economic and health implications of the crisis on people's livelihoods and nutritional status;
  - Support the creation of a structural support mechanism for NGOs and other aid organizations which are also suffering from the impact of the global economic slowdown;
- Facilitate and support **the work of all the aid actors and sector**, and in particular to:
  - Guarantee a flexible approach to adapt the humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic and support for the continuation of operational capacities;
  - Facilitate the work of humanitarian and social staff by guaranteeing humanitarian access and operational response and provide for humanitarian exceptions to not obstruct the global fight against COVID-19; Dedicated flights and travel authorisations should be delivered to humanitarian staff previously cleared of COVID-19 (or tested negative of COVID-19) and work with governments to facilitate entry and movement of such staff; dedicated coordination mechanism on obstacles should be put in place;
  - Take emergency measures to ensure continuity in the whole value chain: handling equipment, transport, stocking, distribution;
  - Ensure that protection gears are made available to all staff working on the response itself. Should national and international staff, including health workers not be urgently protected, consequences will be disastrous;
- Guarantee **access to basic services for all**:
  - Provide support to national and local health authorities to ensure a continuity of care in the short term and to strengthen the health systems in the long run;
  - Invest in the implementation of water, sanitation and hygiene activities and focus on behavioural changes and barriers measures;
  - Preserve the protection and access to basic services for all people, without any form of discrimination, and remain vigilant on all protection concerns that will arise;
  - Ensure sufficient involvement of communities and civil society in the response;
  - Monitor all Government measures to the pandemic that restrict human rights to ensure such measures are not being instrumentalised to further violate the human rights of marginalised communities nor to hinder access to essential services; denounce any human rights or International Humanitarian Law breaches and shrinking of civil society space;
  - Urgently support and guarantee measures to protect food chains, including small producers, to avoid the emergence of local and national food crises, which would have an even greater impact on already vulnerable populations;

In this period, we call on you to reaffirm the importance of international solidarity. ACF will continue to work with all donors, governments and authorities to support the response and will coordinate its actions with all partners, in respect of its mandate and of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence and impartiality.

Yours sincerely,

Jan Sebastian Friedrich-Rust, Chief Executive Officer, Aktion gegen den Hunger, German  
Olivier Longue, Executive Director, Acción contra el Hambre, Spain  
Jean-Francois Riffaud, Director General, Action contre la Faim, France