

Dear Julie and Annamaria,

You had asked me to write a letter about what we are experiencing in Guatemala and specifically about the region where AFOPADI works. A letter is somehow more confidential, it goes directly addressed to someone, and on this occasion, I am writing it for people that are not ordinary; I am doing it for human beings with a conscience, with a particular sense of life and social commitment, for people who feel, live, and express differently.

First stage

Well, to start, I will tell you about some of the actions that we are promoting. We had visited 38 communities intending to create awareness about Coronavirus prevention.

Second stage

We prepared community emergency plans in 42 communities, where the protocol prepared by AFOPADI has been followed. This protocol describes the measures and actions to be taken if a person becomes infected with the virus. For instance, how the family will be supported, how the infected person should be treated, and what are the measures that the community that surrounds them should take.

Third stage

This stage entailed visiting interested communities. In these communities, we raised awareness and encourage motivation to organize themselves to create survival strategies based on their own needs. This stage extends beyond the coronavirus crisis; these are long term plans since these communities must achieve good articulation and organization to keep them from continuing to be plunged into abandonment and poverty.

What have been the actions of the government in the face of the Coronavirus crisis?

We start from a latent reality; our country lives indebted, like all the countries of Latin America, the African continent, and some countries on the East. Countries in development, they are called, because according to the IMF (International Monetary Fund), we are in a historic delay in relation to rich countries. For this reason, the government has taken economic measures to pay the countless amounts of borrowed money that we will never be able to repay because we are all perpetually in debt.

The result of the fulfillment of policies dictated by the IMF, added to the corruption in our countries, has made the health system inefficient, a hospital network in poor condition. Not enough has been invested in the health and education system, therefore the backwardness and inefficiency of both.

For this reason, due to the lack of hospital care and equipment and decent payment to health personnel, health has been privatized. In the end, only those with resources can pay for

treatment; very few people can. Due to this situation, in March, the President decided to go into debt to invest in the remodeling of the entire health system, which for many years, has been declared in bankruptcy.

Unfortunately, despite the large loans made in March under the pretext of attending to the COVID-19 crisis, the situation of hospitals has not improved significantly. Salaries for hospital health personnel have not been paid, and there is not enough equipment necessary to attend patients. Many of the loans made will be paid by the impoverished social classes, who have not been the beneficiaries, in this case, the residents of the municipality of Ixtahuacán.

What to do in a situation like this?

The President has said in the media the following: "Whoever can survive, good for them, those who cannot die. In breach of his duty to watch over people's lives."

What to react to this reality and an absent government? What to do about marginalized communities, in oblivion, that has been denied everything?

The only thing that remains for us to do is to organize and fight together. The pain of abandonment and their trampled dignity is supposed to lead people to politicize their pain and thus unite and resist. If people manage to organize at least at the local level, that can be the foundation to win some daily struggles, such as access to water and sanitation, better education, access to loans for small economic ventures, and quality healthcare.

The idea is to build a long-range political project, and to publicize the reality of indigenous communities, to seek the autonomy of these communities and populations.

All measures against COVID-19, according to security protocols, are for middle-class families. Indigenous people cannot practice these security protocols in the conditions in which they live. This is the reality that we face, it is painful, but you have to change the pain into constructive rage and indignation and stand up and fight for access to justice, freedom, and dignified life.

How to understand this reality, the answers must come from the depths of our being, listening to our inner voices, listening, and obeying our intention, lights and fires will come that will light up within us to illuminate the path and give us strength. The key is not to fight against the current; it is to learn to fight feeling life, and interpreting it in different ways, socializing, looking for alternatives together, analyzing our strategies. Only in this way will we be able to overcome death, poverty, illiteracy, racism, and exclusion.

The invitation is to get together wherever we are, creating small islands, weaving networks of support, feeling the same. We are aware that the same is happening in Chicago since the poor, the marginalized, the refugees, the Afro-descendants, the Latinxs, and the Indigenous population are the ones dying in higher numbers and have their rights to health deprived.

The crises and problems are the same everywhere because the neoliberal economic model is repeated everywhere. The only difference is that impoverished countries, like Guatemala, experience the consequences of these disastrous policies more intensely.