Response to GF/B37/21: Update and Discussion on Health Situation in Venezuela

This paper is developed by the Communities Delegation to complement the Update and Discussion on Health Situation in Venezuela (GF/B37/21) and to provide further detail on the emergency situation in Venezuela. The information presented has been composed in collaboration with the Communities Living with HIV and affected by Tuberculosis and malaria Delegation (Communities Delegation), Developed Country NGO Delegation, and Developing Country NGO Delegation, and the following national, regional and global organizations: ACCSI (Accion Ciudadana Contra el SIDA), Accion Solidaria, CODEVIDA (Coalicion de Organizaciones por los Derechos a la Salud y la Vida) and ICASO.

Health Services in Venezuela

- Venezuela has one of the lowest public health expenditures in Latin America.\(^i\)
- The National Assembly of Venezuela projects that inflation will exceed 670% by the end of 2017.\(^ii\)
- The mortality statistics are reported with two and even three years of delay and present high levels of underreporting.\(^iii\)
- The government of Venezuela has been promoting and allowing acts of harassment against those who report, document and denounce the health situation.
- The shortages of essential drugs, vaccines, surgical and basic medical supplies, including reagents for diagnostics are at critical levels throughout the country.\(^iv\)
- Between 2009 and 2014, the number of operative beds in public hospitals fell by 10,143.\(^v\)
- In 2012, the Ministry of Health reported that the reduction in the number of beds had meant to stop serving 1,125,610 persons.\(^vi\)
- In 2015, 61% of hospitals had severely dysfunctional or faulty surgical medical material, 86% had damaged x-ray equipment, 94% had damaged or had no tomography services, 94% of laboratories were without any reagents and 44% of hospitals had to close down surgical rooms.\(^vii\)
- In February, the Venezuelan Pharmaceutical Federation (FEFARVEN) warned that the levels of shortages had reached 80%.\(^viii\)
- Public hospitals and clinics have lost 6,700 physicians.\(^ix\)

Persons at risk

- 63,000 people living with HIV (Dec 2015)\(^x\) who have suffered frequent interruptions of antiretroviral treatment\(^xi\) and face the permanent shortage of CD4 and viral load reagents.\(^xii\)
- 16,000 people with kidney problems requiring dialysis and routine exams.\(^xiii\)
- More than 50% of the population over 50 years of age is affected, presenting (risks of) hypertension or diabetes.
- 1,500 persons with cancer are affected by a lack of reagents and nuclear medicine drugs.
- 5,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer do not have access to essential drugs.
- Maternal mortality rates increased from 67 to 130 deaths per 100,000 live births from 2014 to 2016.\(^xiv\)
- Incarcerated people face severe adversities of health and have been adversely affected by outbreaks of tuberculosis.
Impact of the health system crisis

- The weaknesses in the health system of Venezuela has resulted in a rebound of diseases that had previously been classified as eradicated, for example diphtheria and malaria among others.
- Production of pharmaceutical products including essential medicines as come to a complete halt. Due to towering debts with international pharmaceutical companies and lack of access to foreign currency, there are no means to import medicines.
- The country is submerged in an institutional and structural crisis where there is absence of the most basic commodities. The protocol for pregnant women living with HIV is not being implemented, there is no access to C-sections and no available formulas for babies.
- At present, Venezuelans are subjected to queues and long waiting times in supermarkets for basic food and other products: chicken, sugar, rice, coffee, milk, etc. After several hours of waiting, products often have run out.
- A study by Caritas de Venezuela in 2016 identified 25% of children showing acute malnutrition and 28% showing a risk of malnutrition. The recorded levels of global acute malnutrition in the four federal entities are close to a situation of “average severity” according to the WHO classification system for assessing malnutrition in populations.
- The HIV epidemic is seeing its highest peak ever with 31 new infections daily and 11,000 new infections yearly, according to the National Follow Up Report on the 2001 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.

We urge the Global Fund, as a funding mechanism, but first and foremost as a partnership, to respond to this human crisis, looking beyond the limitations of policies and income classifications.

As much as we acknowledge the realities of systems and procedures, our delegation is firmly of the belief that any decision should be based on our shared mission to save lives.

We therefore call on this board as a whole as well as on individual constituencies to provide immediate concrete assistance in order to prevent further deterioration of the health system, avert current resurgence of epidemics and keep people alive.

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1. WHO. World Health Statistics, 2014
3. An example is the absence of information on HIV, transmission cases reach 90% under reporting.
4. The coverage remains below the standard recommended by WHO.
6. MPPS: ‘Memoria y Cuenta 2012,’ page 114
7. Survey conducted by the Network of Physicians for Health (Red de Medicos por la Salud) in 130 hospitals in 19 states.
9. Statistics of the Venezuelan Medical Federation (FMV)