

Pakistan: Demands for Rapid People's Response in times of Corona

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HAQOOQ-E-KHALQ MOVEMENT'S OPEN STATEMENT TO PAKISTAN'S GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON CORONAVIRUS.

We are deeply concerned about the well-being of all residents of Pakistan and the economic hardship facing so many at this time. The World Health Organization says governments must identify, track, isolate and treat each case. Our governments are not taking this pandemic seriously enough, telling us not to panic, and sending the message to the public that there is little that needs to be done.

They are assuming the coronavirus pandemic will somehow spare Pakistan after less than a month. Yet the experiences of other more functional countries than ours are having total meltdowns, while Pakistan does next to nothing to rapidly prepare and boost its own capacity by reallocating the necessary funds to the urgent tasks before us.

- We need isolation for everyone who is sick, treatment for everyone who needs it, and testing for everyone who asks for it.

Now.

- We must do everything we can to create the capacity in our health system, including reallocating funds for debtors and defense, to defend our communities from the spread of this pandemic.

- We need the government and employers to ensure wages to people who have to stay home because they are sick or to look after children.

- We need to make sure everyone has food and medicines, and to reallocate unnecessary budgetary allocations toward this urgent task.

We, therefore, call upon the government of Pakistan at all levels to enact the following measures to mitigate the social and economic impact that the spread of the Coronavirus entails:

1. Free and Accessible Testing:

- Make the test (& eventual vaccine) freely accessible for all at hospitals and laboratories.

2. Free High-quality Treatment:

- Nationalise all private hospitals and health providers in a timely manner to contain the spread and to ensure free of charge quality-treatment for patients.

- Massively expand capacity through provision of 'protective suits' and auxiliary equipment for medical workers. Immediate procurement of thousands of ventilators, beds, linens, cleaning supplies and other necessary provisions to save patients and protect medical workers and cleaners. Increase personnel in health services to address understaffing.

- Ensure ample supply of electricity, safe water and other necessary public services to hospitals and

clinics.

- Distribute free quality hand sanitizer, soaps, cleaning supplies, effective masks and clear directives to all.

3. Protect Rural Communities:

- Establish medical camps and tests for farming communities that lack hospitals and clinics.

4. Temporary Closure of Certain Businesses:

- Temporarily shut down factories, plants and assembling units producing goods not essential for survival in times of crisis. This includes units producing paints, automobiles, electronics, textile goods, leather products, sports goods, etc.
- Temporarily close all crowded spaces including malls, amusement parks, sports stadiums, cinemas, theatres, museums, art centres, galleries, etc.

5. Repurpose Certain Manufacturing Units and Stop Price Gouging:

- Repurpose manufacturing units producing goods not crucial for survival in times of crisis. Produce necessary medical equipment and supplies in Pakistan.
- End price gouging of essential medical and food supplies.

6. Paid Sick-leave for All Workers:

- All businesses and organisations (private, public and non-governmental) must give workers (both regular and contract) paid sick leave for the duration of the emergency.
- If the private businesses fail to cover contract workers, the government must immediately establish a 'Wafaqi Fund' to reimburse contract workers for lost wages.

7. Safe Working Conditions:

- Ensure complete safety of all workers engaged in sectors and businesses necessary to operate during this time.

8. Safe Housing:

- Suspend evictions and freeze rents for the duration of the crisis. Provide steady supply of electricity, water and other utilities, regardless of ability to pay by laid off workers.
- Appropriate the thousands of empty houses and plazas in urban centres to be used as temporary abodes for evicted students/workers and the homeless, rather than serving as agents of speculation for real estate tycoons to make profits.
- Ensure the spaces given are ample to meet the needs of social distancing, rather than crowding quarters and creating sites for further virus transmission.

9. Maintain Healthy and Safe Conditions at Quarantine Camps:

- Ensure safe living conditions and clearance procedures employed at all quarantine sites, including the Taftan Quarantine Camp.
- Immediately provide high-quality testing and healthcare services and significantly improve quarantine conditions.
- Immediately install an effective clearance mechanism at the camps to ensure they can function as a quarantine centre, not breeding grounds for the virus.
- Appropriate empty houses and plazas in urban centres to operate as additional quarantine centres for infectors to ensure mandatory distance between potentially infected individuals

10. Protect Prisoners and Patients: Protect prisoners in jails, mentally ill people at rehab centres, and all other patients undergoing medical treatment at hospitals and healthcare centres.

11. Provide a Pro-People Economic Relief Package for the Economy, Not a Corporate

Bailout:

- No bailouts or tax breaks to be offered to MNCs and local corporations in the aftermath of economic slowdown.
- Engaging with people's movements design a pro-people economic relief package that can put people to work in safe conditions and meet basic needs without leaving anyone behind

12. Support Small and Medium Local Businesses: Defer utility bills and freeze rents during the period of crisis for small and medium local businesses.

13. Ensure Food Supply and Access to Basic Necessities:

- Incentivise farmers and urban gardeners to grow local food through regenerative agriculture to stave off food shortages
- Issue food cards, ration kits and basic sanitary products to all vulnerable workers or unemployed/underemployed people.
- Ensure that delivery of all basic necessities are provided to utility stores and shops in the poorest areas.
- Implement meal deliveries to vulnerable and quarantined populations.

14. Uphold Democratic Rights and Transparency:

- Ensure that the crisis response does not diminish but rather enrich our democratic rights and institutions.
- Conduct governmental meetings through teleconferences with full transparency to the public.

15. Transnational Solidarity:

- Offer solidarity and support to Worst-hit Developing Countries.
- Push for repeal of US-imposed sanctions on Iran and other corona hotspots to be able to cope with the crisis.
- Request support from wealthy nations in the form of funds, in-kind donations of ventilators and other necessary equipment, debt write-offs, and suspension of payments to MNCs and IPPs

16- Fully join the global campaign for the cancellation of Third World debt as none of the Third World countries are equipped, financially or otherwise, to deal with a deadly pandemic.

We call upon those who are young, healthy and not residing with vulnerable populations to volunteer to help provide mutual aid and emergency support in their communities, hospitals and wherever needed, working alongside government agencies and other volunteer organizations.
