

Brazilian Amazon Bishops call for attention for indigenous peoples



The 67 Bishops of the Brazilian Amazon appeal for special attention for the vulnerable people of the Amazon and the rainforest.

Bishops of the Brazilian Amazon have expressed their concerns about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the peoples of the Amazon and the rainforest. In a statement issued on 4 May they call for “urgent measures from the Federal Government, the National Congress, the State Governments and the Legislative Assemblies.”

“The peoples of the Amazon demand special attention from the authorities so that their lives are not further violated. The statistics reported by the media do not correspond to reality. Testing is insufficient to know the real expansion of the virus. Many people with evident symptoms of the disease die at home without medical assistance or access to a hospital,” reads the statement.

The statement, signed by all 67 Bishops of the Amazon, was issued by the Episcopal Commission for the Amazon of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB).

Poor healthcare

Alarmed at the poor access to healthcare of the population of the Amazon, the Bishops note that “extensive areas of the Amazon have no ICU beds at all and only a few municipalities meet the minimum requirements recommended by the World Health Organization.” They further observe that the forest peoples and those living in the peripheries lack basic sanitation, housing, food and employment opportunities.

The prelates remind the authorities that “it is the State's obligation to guarantee them the rights stated in the Federal Constitution by offering minimum conditions which will help them get through this difficult time.”

Deforestation

The Bishops also turned their attention to the effects of the virus on the rainforest. According to data released by the National Institute for Space Research (INPE), deforestation in the Amazon grew by 279.9% in March 2020.

This is due to the increase in legal and illegal mining and reclaiming of the forest soybean plantations and cattle ranching. Contributing to this growth is “the notorious loosening of land inspections and the continuous political discourse against environmental protection and indigenous areas protected by the Federal Constitution,” notes the statement.

Violence

Another cause for concern for the Bishops is the increase in violence in the countryside and the militarization of the Commission for the Amazon.

The Bishops remark that this is caused by “the extinction, scrapping, financial restructuring and political instrumentalization of agencies such as the Ministry of Agrarian Development (MDA), the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), the Brazilian Institute of the Environment (IBAMA) and agricultural, environmental and labour inspection and control agencies.”

Call for urgent measures

The Bishops’ statement lists thirteen points which they stress upon as requiring crucial attention.

The CNBB calls on authorities to save human lives by strengthening public polices and rebuilding communities. They also appeal for a rejection of discourses “that discredits the effectiveness of scientific strategies” and the provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers in the frontlines.

As regards the indigenous population, the CNBB requests for restrictive measures on the entry of people into their territories and the testing of the population for Covid-19. They also appeal for food security for them and the participation of civil society, social movements and representatives of traditional populations in the spaces of political decision making.

Additionally, the prelates propose the strengthening of inspection measures against deforestation and artisanal mining in indigenous lands. Also, they demand the repeal of a decree concerning the Commission for the Amazon, and of a normative instruction that allows the invasion, exploitation and commercialization of indigenous lands.

Coronavirus

The Amazon area in Brazil has been hard hit by the pandemic. It has over 6,000 infected people and a high coronavirus mortality rate. As of Tuesday morning, Brazil has 108,620 reported cases, 7,367 dead and 45,815 recovered patients.

Source: VaticanNews - By Fr. Benedict Mayaki, SJ 05 May 2020