

Armenia and COVID-19

In the international context: Solidarity and commitment

COVID-19 burst into our lives in times of uncertainty and lack of effective responses to the great challenges facing humanity.

The caring for the environment and the consequences of climate change, authoritarian drifts in some countries in Europe and Latin America, the exacerbation of nationalisms and populisms, the undermining of multilateralism and the system of international cooperation, together with the slowdown in the economy, generated tensions which have tested global governance and the strength of democratic institutions.

The derived health crisis with its immeasurable economic and social consequences has given relevance to the place and role of the State that emerges as the sole guarantor and protector of the common interest.

COVID-19 in Armenia *(figures to 04/05/2020)*

Total infected : 2507

Active infectes : 1397

Recovered:1071

Deaths : 39

Lethality : 1.6%

Total tested: 24942

The first case in Armenia was detected on February 28, in a citizen returning from Iran. The initial massive focus corresponded to a group of infected passengers who entered the country on February 29 from Italy.

In late January, the government formed an Operational Group under the direction of the Vice Prime Minister to monitor the evolution of the pandemic. The Group's reaction and taking of measures was slow and late, particularly regarding the control of passengers from abroad and the carrying out of tests.

Faced with the worsening of the situation, the government declared a State of Emergency as of March 16 and implemented restrictions on the movement of people and economic activity. On March 29, quarantine was declared and even more restrictive measures were imposed.

At the same time, the government ordered a series of measures to mitigate the effects of the restrictions. The launch of a US \$ 300 million (150 trillion dram) aid package for commerce and the most vulnerable sectors of the population was announced. But, economic aid did not meet the requirements of the different sectors.

Under current conditions, Armenia loses approximately 50 million dollars per day, and a drop of between 10 and 15% of GDP is forecast for the current year.

Since the launch of the State of Emergency, Parliament has continued to operate with some operational restrictions. The ruling bloc imposed extraordinary sessions for the treatment and approval of controversial projects such as reforms to labor legislation and the telecommunications law that violate individual rights. This was carried out unexpectedly and without prior discussion with the opposition.

Despite the high number of those infected, the curve has been flattened and the health system has responded efficiently.

The Prime Minister announced the gradual lifting of restrictions as of May 4, aimed at restarting economic activity in some specific sectors while maintaining social distancing, wearing face masks and other sanitary restrictions.

If this trend continues and according to the behavior of the population, the State of Emergency may be lifted on May 14.

Given the gravity of the situation and the speed of contagion in the population, on March 24 our party presented to the authorities a package of 48 measures to confront the pandemic. They cover legal, governance, health, economic and financial aspects in a State of Emergency. Proposals for public transport, social security, food supply and national defense.

Unfortunately, our proposal has not been echoed by the authorities, although some of the proposed measures have been implemented.

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the health systems of our countries, the responsiveness of governments, and the strength of economies. We have also seen the tendency towards authoritarianism, the advancement of some rulers on the rights of citizens and also the greater vulnerability of the most neglected sectors. All this configures a panorama of greater polarization and tension in our societies.

The much-needed international solidarity and cooperation have not lived up to the needs, and the socio-economic consequences appear to be catastrophic.

As members of the Socialist International we are facing the great challenge and opportunity to contribute to the construction of a fairer and more egalitarian world for which no one can be absent or avoid their responsibilities.

Mario Nalpatian

Vice-President Socialist International

ARF Armenian Socialist Party