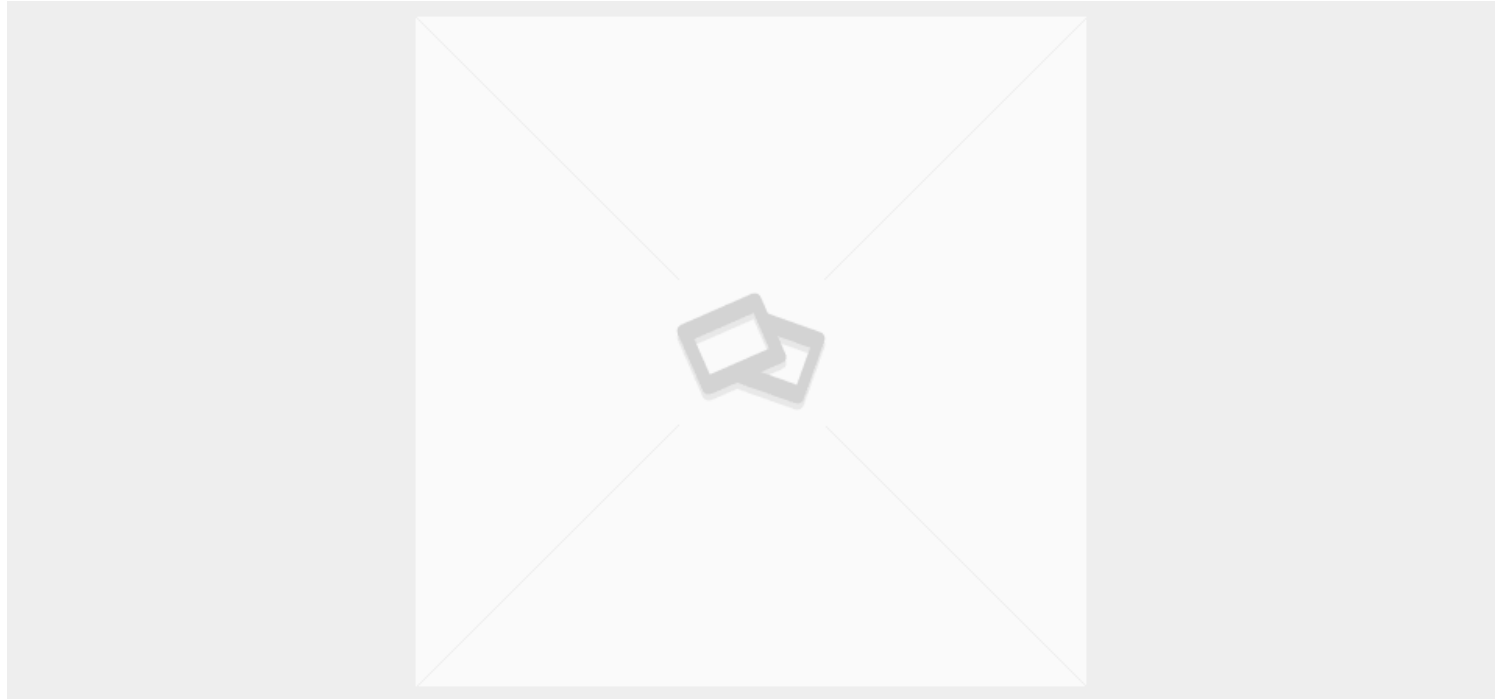


VENEZUELA: DYING FOR GLOBAL HEALTH ATTENTION

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It is well known that Venezuela is in a deepening mess that is here to stay for long. It no longer matters what lead to the crisis and different sources have different versions of the story to tell. Violence and looting, has surrounded the country side on a normal day. It is little different from terrorism for innocent civilians, desperately searching for meaning and direction. Watch group observatory for violence said that on an average around 10 lootings are taking place daily where people are searching for rice to detergents to toilet paper and also beer. Lack of electricity has created massive rolling blackouts. Large scale violence has engulfed Venezuela and people are robbing and killing for a living. Going by records, Venezuela's capital is the most violent city in the world with the highest rate of global homicides. The kidnapping rate when compared to countries like Afghanistan and Iraq and Syria also remains high in Venezuela. This is clearly a society in distress.

International humanitarian organizations are yet to arrive in bulk as the government is showing heightened levels of arrogance to accepting global help.

Amidst all the economic disruptions the health impact that is being built on Venezuela is pushing the civilians to the brink and is almost a unique man made humanitarian disaster. Venezuela's economy

is one of the worst in the world and according to the International Monetary Fund, the recession and downward spiral in economy will remain until 2019. Inflation grew upto 500% this year and this is not a very encouraging sign for the future of the Latin American country.

Venezuela's top three universities showed that people were eating less than three meals a day, which was revealed through a research study. Eating less will naturally lead to decreased nutritional intakes and will eventually make civilians vulnerable to certain diseases. Children who do not get food and are under 5 years old, will go into malnutrition that remains a significant problem in Venezuela. Doctors have abandoned hospitals and left the place because of gross distress. No doctors in hospitals means the end in view for those patients on palliative care and those suffering from chronic diseases. What is alarming is that the International community has not yet understood the magnitude of the problem and global aid has not yet started coming into Venezuela. The global media are far too isolated and have not felt the desperation of the situation. Possibly for countries in Europe and Asia, Latin American Crisis gets neglected attention. El Guri Dam, the country's main power generating source is at new record low level and the government blames drought to run away from taking responsibility and fixing the problem. In the light of this emergency, the United Nations should pressurise the International Community and the diplomatic wings to tell the world of this deepening crisis. The global health community are tearing their heads apart. From juggling the African health situation which struggles for basic health care, to addressing migrant issues on health in Europe, to focusing on war zones and depleting health work-force in those conflict zones, to facing disasters and emerging infections, to address rising burden of non-communicable diseases and to pacify road injury victims, increased spending and increased corporate spending for social responsibility should become the dictum of the day.

Venezuela's Government is in distress, it cannot afford to pay for products like sugar, eggs, flour and milk. In the light of sugar crisis, the global giant of beverages, Coke announced stoppage of its outlets in Venezuela. Government officials work only twice a week to save electricity and medical supplies are getting scare. The nation's 30 million people are only counting on hope and prayer to resurrect them from this crisis.

Are we listening?

Recently in a statement, The Ministry of Health, Venezuela said that 75 % of the medicines described as "essential" is not existing in Venezuela and with the added burden of Zika virus epidemic doing the rounds, the collapse of the health system is imminent. However, the health system's decline will not only paralyze Venezuela's citizens, it is going to create devastating impact on neighbouring countries like Colombia and Guyana which is already in political crisis.

The solution to the above is straightforward. International pressure on the Venezuela Government to encourage and appeal to outside help needs to be stepped up, to seek soft loans from other nations and to take tough decision to reduce inflation. To address health care as a very very urgent mandate and permit outside health workers to remain in the country for at least a year. In answering some of these basics, we will be able to move forward slowly, very slowly.

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