

Warm Greetings from Latin America and the Caribbean. I´m Dr H.C. Humberto Martín Shikiya, Vice President of the board of CREAS. CREAS is a Church related organization that works ecumenically in LAC in the development of capacities for diaconal work and development in local churches and community organizations. We aim our work at the poorest and most vulnerable people.

This a very special time in our liturgic calendar. In Advent, the Christian and non-Christian world gets ready to celebrate Christmas. This time reminds us how God loves us as sons and daughters. In Latin America and the Caribbean, Advent and Christmas are moments to celebrate our faith in community, bringing people and hopes together.

2020 will find our families and communities in a situation we never lived before due to the Coronavirus pandemic. This pandemic is calling the whole world to international solidarity among countries and peoples. Our religious and social leaders have expressed that "nobody can save himself or herself alone". We need love, mercy and compassion.

International organizations affirm that those will suffer the most the impact of the pandemic will be the poorest, widening the inequalities we had before the irruption of the pandemic.

Being Latin America and the Caribbean the continent with the highest inequality in the world, the social, economic and environmental impact will be larger. We recently saw this impact with the hurricanes that hit Central America and the Caribbean. The same is happening with the fire in the Amazon and in the southern parts of South America, affecting the most vulnerable populations, our indigenous peoples and afro-Latin American communities.

Faced the proposal that the government of the United Kingdom will put forward to the British Parliament to decide among other measures to reduce the budget of international aid from 0.7% to 0.5%, we want to express as a Latin American faith based organization, that we are disappointed for the lack of social sensibility before the present crisis, especially towards those who most suffer the economic, social and environmental consequences.

While sharing this, it comes to my mind the faces of millions of boys and girls, youth and women who are affected by the growth of the pandemic. This millions of human faces that work to build their own dignity required and demand international aid and global solidarity.

If the British Parliament passes the proposal of the government of the United Kingdom to reduce international aid, projects supported in several areas in Latin America will be affected in a negative way. This includes programs of climate resilience, humanitarian aid, economic development, education, health, food resilience, support for human rights and democracy,

disaster preparation, reorientation of gender inequalities, and more. This decision will sink countries in a deeper poverty.

If in addition the British government increases its national defense budget, its international cooperation policy will give the back to millions of poor people who see in this aid the seeds of hope of a different world.

From CREAS, the organization I represent, I do not only express my disappointment but also speak out to call for this proposal not to be put forward.

In this time of Advent and Christmas, let us turn our eyes to the God that became a child in a manger, so that God brings forth sensitivity, mercy and charity in our hearts and minds. Let us portray the Good News to our most suffering brothers and sisters, so that our hope is renewed in human dignity and care for our environment.

May the time and spirit of Advent and Christmas allow the members of the British Parliament to take the right decisions, in order not to reduce the budget for international aid, but to reduce the suffering of millions of lives that strive to live in peace and dignity.