

The Right to Food Venezuela's Executive Summary

This is an Alternative Report prepared jointly by the Venezuelan Health Observatory (OVS), the Bengoa Foundation for Food and Nutrition and the Centre for Agrifood Research (CIAAL), for consideration by the members of the Committee on Economic, Social Rights and Cultural of the United Nations to check and review the examination to be conducted by the Venezuelan State on compliance and implementation of the provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which will be held in June 2015 during the 55th Period Committee sessions in Geneva. The report deals with Article 11 of the Covenant, which recognizes the right to adequate food (Article 11.1) and the right to protection from hunger (Article 11.2), according to the General Comment No. 12 of the Committee, and further information is presented to the report presented by the State in 2012 and in response to the list of issues sent to the Committee in 2015.

The food situation in Venezuela is characterized by a significant contraction in domestic food production and large amounts of imports, which reported a fall in recent years. These two features together produce a permanent shortage and, as a result, a situation of high vulnerability for achieving protection against hunger, since existing programs are not able to reach those who are most in need. Thus, it can be observed, the rise of obesity in one hand while undernutrition on the other is still prevalence, conforming the so called "double burden of malnutrition" phenomena. In addition, there are serious restrictions on access to information and availability of data, and the impact of the economic measures and scarcity, on the current nutritional status of the population is not known. In this sense, the State's argument that "Today in Venezuela 95.4% of Venezuelans eat 3 or more times a day", in contrast to other research study conducted in 2014 which reported that 11.2% people in a nationally representative sample, eat fewer than 2 meals a day should be discussed. This study is the Living Conditions of the Venezuelan Population Survey (ENCOVI, 2014) performed by three universities: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Universidad Simon Bolivar and Andres Bello Catholic University.

Given this situation and in order to guarantee the availability and accessibility of food, the organizations that are in charge of performing this report, we kindly ask the members of the Committee, to urge the State to adopt economic policies that allow a

process to reduce shortages, taking measures to promote a free and open economy, price controls to be reviewed, since producers must not sell their products losing their capital and money. Particularly in the agri-food sector, it is advisable to apply measures to encourage food production, according to the caloric and nutrient needs of the Venezuelan population, eliminating the land expropriation laws and policies to ensure that the state does not contribute to the abandonment of agricultural projects, and respect private property owners to be an alternative to the state and generate incentives to producers. There is also the need to suggest to diversify the industry and conduct efficient imports to combat food shortages and prevent hunger in the future.

In conjunction with these measures, we want to ask the Committee to advise the State to strengthen efficient programs for achieving the consumption of healthy foods in disadvantaged population. This can be performed through technical adequacy, monitoring of food safety, compliance with regulatory standards that guarantee food safety and community involvement, along with capacity building in food and nutrition matters. In the shorter term, it is necessary to ensure the health of affected populations, in particular, address the situation of obese people who need help to get healthy food, and undernourished people through programs of nutritional recovery. The School Feeding Programme (PAE) should be reviewed, as inconsistencies in the delivery and dispatch of the meals have been important issues that have been obstacles for the success of this program, in which indicators such as height and age must be included to validate the adequacy of the intake of children and ensure that the needs of the growing process are met.

Finally, we also request the Committee to urge the State to restore and update as soon as possible information systems on nutritional status of the population, such as the SISVAN, the food and nutrition surveillance system which is not updated since 2007. Ensuring public access to reliable and detailed data allows, with the assistance of independent researchers and academia, to conduct methodologically well designed studies on the prevalence of overweight-obesity and undernutrition, in order to assess the problems and obtain accurate diagnosis. We also ask the committee to urge the State to open scientific debate and engage the industry in social responsibility actions concerning food and nutrition, along with government support and academia.