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Brasilia, March 13 (RHC)-- In Brazil, it has been one year since the first COVID-19 related death took place -- exasperated by President Jair Bolsonaro's catastrophic handling of the pandemic. Public hospitals are at a very critical point and gravediggers are working at the limit of their strength in cemeteries that continue to fill up in the midst of the second wave.

Contrary to the global trend towards stabilization, Brazil presents the worst scenario since the beginning of the pandemic and has become the country with the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths per day. In the last two days alone, this South American nation surpassed the 2,000 deaths per day mark.

Sao Paulo is home to Vila Formosa, the largest cemetery in Latin America. Similar to what happened in March 2020, its workers do not stop burying the victims of the absence of science-grounded, sound health policies.

"We thought that the situation was going to stabilize this year but so far it has not normalized," Vila Formosa Coordinator James Alan said, adding that the gravediggers bury up to 66 corpses per day. "If this pandemic doesn't end, next year we will be worse and so on," he predicts.

In April 2020, the Sao Paulo City Hall announced the opening of some 8,000 new graves in Vila Formosa and all of them have already been occupied. Hospital systems in three of Brazil's five regions have collapsed because of the explosion of COVID-19 cases. As mutations originating in Manaus and Rio de Janeiro spread around the World, the Bolsonaro government continues to refuse to issue a lockdown order.

Across the country, intensive care units (ICU) continue to have occupancy rates above 80 percent and an estimated 40,000 people are waiting for a bed. "ICU occupancy rates in the public health system remain in a very critical state," the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ), the Latin American epidemiological research and reference center, warned.

The worsening of the pandemic is notorious in the state of Sao Paulo, where the subnational government has run out of colors to classify the seriousness of the situation. After decreeing the "red phase", local authorities had to create the "emergency phase" to establish even stricter restrictions and avoid the collapse of the public network.

So far, only 5.8 percent of Brazilians have received the first dose of any vaccine. However, the far-right Captain Bolsonaro, who this week reacted timidly to the tragedy and authorized the use of vaccines, vows that 212 million people will be immunized in the coming months.

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