

The poor at greatest risk from COVID-19



An overwhelming example of the turbulent times that we are experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, are the fragile boats stranded in the Gulf of Bengal, very close to the shores of Bangladesh, where hundreds of Rohingyas are dying for the lack of food and water. And still, none of the governments have accepted to receive them into their country and provide the necessary assistance.

The Rohingya people are a stateless Indo-Aryan ethnic group, to which Myanmar authorities have denied citizenship, and don't even recognize their history under the national law. They are a small population who predominantly follows Islam in a mostly Buddhist nation, and are being persecuted and threatened since the mid-nineteenth century for racist and religious reasons. But the situation worsened in 2017, when the Aung San Suu Kyi government, ironically a Nobel Peace Prize winner, sent the army to eliminate them.

They usually escape by sea or land to the neighboring nation of Bangladesh, but now, with the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic as an excuse, they were denied the entry and are stranded at sea with their lives at risk.

A few days ago, the European Union asked the governments of that Asian region to undertake a rescue operation and guarantee their safety, but so far there's been no response, although it is known that there have been several deaths aboard the small ships.

Unfortunately, this is not the only dramatic scene that unfolds before the silence or ignorance of the international community.

In the North African region, tens of thousands of human beings are equally trapped in the desert or along the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea.

Libya, because of COVID-19, decided to expel numerous migrants between March and April, but many were stuck in the desert or crowded in unsanitary camps. Most of them do not have documents, hence they are not accepted back to their country.

Spain, Italy and Greece, were the main destination of those migrants, but they closed their borders and even the ships belonging to humanitarian organizations in charge of rescuing castaway people are required to remain stranded in ports.

Our continent is not exempt to this inhumane situation. Donald Trump took advantage of the pandemic and expelled thousands of undocumented immigrants, including those who had already begun an asylum application process.

They were sent to Mexico, and this country moved them to the Guatemalan border, where several groups were left to fend for themselves. People nearby are afraid to assist them for fear of an infection with the new coronavirus that is tightening the conditions of our poorest communities.

It is, indeed, the poorest who are suffering the most from the current global situation.

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