



## Zero World Hunger

Marx was right: we have not yet left the pre-history of humanity behind. There are 6.1 billion people upon the planet earth, and 4 billion of them live below the poverty line. They survive on less than \$30 per month and 841 million of them suffer from chronic malnutrition.

Every 24 hours, 100,000 people die of starvation. 30,000 of them are children of 5 years and under. The third anniversary of September 11, the day on which the Twin Towers of New York were destroyed, has recently been observed. An immense commotion followed the attack. Every day, famine destroys 10 towers full of children. No-one cries or complains. Why?

On September 20 and 21, at the opening of the General Assembly of the United Nations, President Lula will promote the Zero World Hunger project in New York. It will be supported by 55 heads of state, including Pope John Paul II.

If hunger is the principal cause of premature death and shame for the civilization of the 21st century, why does it not provoke mobilization? For a cynical reason: in contrast with terrorism, war, cancer and other diseases, hunger distinguishes between classes. It hits only the impoverished. And, in general, we sustain its campaigns to our own advantage. We are not always sensitive to the rights of others.

Lula has learned, given the history of slavery in Brazil, that social problems find solutions only when they become political problems. For more than 300 years, slavery remained legitimate and legal. But, a little before 1888, it became a political issue. Official abolition followed (even if we all know that in our own country it continues under the Fazendeiros, the owners of large areas of farming land who keep their workers in regimes of slavery

At this very moment, millions of Brazilians benefit from Zero Hunger, including 5 million families who receive a monthly supplement thanks to the program called 'Family Shopping Bag' (Bolsa Família). A non-charitable public policy without social implications, Bolsa Familia has attracted the attention of other countries. I have already visited Paraguay, Argentina, Peru, Guatemala, Italy, Spain and the UN to spread the word.

Similar initiatives exist in Chile, Argentina, Mexico and Guatemala. They are raising awareness of famine as a scourge that must be combated immediately. We must commit ourselves so that poverty, along with slavery and torture is recognized as an ignoble crime, a grave violation of human rights.

President Lula wants to avoid what has happened in Brazil happening elsewhere, where famine has been countered only with the distribution of food. If a rich country sends a ton of food to the poorest place on earth, it commits four errors: justifying agricultural subsidies, destroying local cultures, increasing dependency on aid and favoring the corrupt politicians who distribute these donations. This failings of the Alliance for Progress in the 60s and the Green Revolution in the following decades are already sufficient for us to know in which direction not to go.



  
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The proposal is to mobilize global resources, though Brazil will not benefit to avoid raising suspicion that it is pleading its own cause. These resources, under the supervision of the UN, will finance business, cooperative and sustainable development projects in the poorest regions—since famine cannot be fought with donations, still less so with income transfers. housing concessions. They must be part of effective policies of structural change, including agricultural and fiscal reform, capable of decentralizing land rents and financial revenues.

This has to be supported by bold policies of investment and credit to families, who must also be assisted by an intense program of education, according to the model of Paulo Freire, thus becoming socio-economic protagonists and political and historical actors.

“I was hungry and you fed me,” said Christ, embodied in the figure of the pauper. Fighting famine is an evangelical mission, an ethical imperative, a duty of citizenship and solidarity. Only thus can we remove humanity from pre-history, in which billions of people are still not ensured even the most elementary right; the right to eat.

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