



May 5th, 2020

LETTER TO LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES

The Latin American and Caribbean Network of Waste Pickers (LACRE Network) is an organization of national movements of grassroots waste pickers in the continent, with delegates from 17 countries. We participate in regional and global initiatives, alliances, and platforms, seeking to promote the effective recognition and economic, social, technical, and environmental inclusion of grassroots waste pickers.

In Latin America, we are more than two million women, men, and elderly people dedicated to recycling. Day by day we work with waste, rescuing it from the streets and dumps, making an invaluable contribution to the planet and the growth of the circular economy. We are a key link in the chain of post-consumer product recovery, preventing it from ending up in landfills, dumps, or nature.

Within the framework of integrated waste management, our work reintroduces to the productive chain raw materials obtained from containers, packaging, and products made of cardboard, paper, glass, metals, and plastics. In this way, we contribute to:

1. Reducing the extraction of virgin raw material, avoiding the degradation of ecosystems.
2. Providing a significant percentage of recycled raw materials needed by industry, reducing costs in industrial manufacturing processes.
3. Reducing the amount of waste to final disposal in landfills and dumps.
4. Saving money for the municipal waste collection service and the citizens.
5. Living in cleaner cities.

But most importantly for all of us, is that recycling is how we have sustained our families, millions of girls, boys, men, women, and elders.

Grassroots waste pickers' work is a dignified activity and an essential public health service in every municipality, city, and country where the waste management is undertaken. Unfortunately, we are in a vulnerable position in the face of the pandemic that is sweeping our planet. We are workers in the frontline exposed to the virus, and since our work is an essential service, we need the support, protection, and certain guarantees from governments, companies, and citizens in general.

Grassroots waste pickers in Latin America and the Caribbean united in the LACRE Network call on governments to:

- a- Generate policies to directly support waste pickers with specific food assistance and vouchers to alleviate the precarious situation of waste pickers, who will be unable to work on the streets due to this pandemic, particularly for women, older people, the sick, and disabled.



- b- To guarantee that we are authorized to provide recycling services during the mandatory social confinement measures, being acknowledged as an essential service.
- c- Provide necessary Personal Protection Elements: uniform, masks, gloves, goggles, and materials for hand washing and permanent disinfection systems.
- d- Authorize other entities in the value chain such as warehouses, intermediaries, and industries that use recyclable materials to operate.
- e- To involve us in the decision making process about recycling and waste management through our leaders and organizations.
- f- Identify the population of grassroots waste pickers in Latin American and Caribbean countries, conduct and update censuses and cadasters.
- g- As essential service providers, as well as medical and other essential service providers, waste pickers are on the front line in the fight against the pandemic. In this regard, grassroots waste pickers must be guaranteed access to adequate health care in the event of infection and ensure preferential access to vaccines, where available.

We call on governments throughout Latin America and the Caribbean to follow these principles, to defend and protect their waste pickers, because in Latin America: Recycling Without Waste Pickers is Garbage!

Silvio Ruiz Grisales

Operations Secretariat Red LACRE
Waste Pickers Association of Colombia

Severino Lima Junior

International Agenda Secretariat Red LACRE
Association of Recyclable Materials Collectors
of Brazil

Soledad Mella Vidal