

Health, Democracy and Development in a Multipolar World: Challenges and Paths Toward the Sovereignty of Peoples*

Your Excellencies from the Government of Kerala, speakers, delegates, scientists, activists and representatives of social movements,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great honor and satisfaction that I address this prestigious International Conference on Development and Democracy, Vision 2031, particularly the Session on Health and Nutrition. I salute the Indian people and the Government of Kerala for this deeply relevant initiative, which invites us to reflect on the destinies of our nations at a moment of historic transformations here, through the lens of health and nutrition.

I speak from the perspective of Brazil, a nation that, like India, carries the complexity and the strength of a continental and diverse country that strives to build its own path amid a turbulent global scenario. The relationship between health, democracy and development is not, for us, an abstract matter, but the very core of our historical experience and our present challenges.

We live in a time of systemic crisis of capitalism, marked by the financialization of the economy, the deepening of inequalities, and the precarization of life in all its dimensions, especially health.

The neoliberal model imposed for decades has demonstrated its failure to promote social well-being, concentrating wealth brutally and undermining the foundations of national sovereignty. In Brazil, we have felt deeply the effects of this agenda, which resulted in deindustrialization, attacks on workers' rights, and the erosion of our sovereignty.

However, history is not linear. The election of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2022, returning to the presidency for a third term after an unjust imprisonment, represented the Brazilian people's commitment to rebuilding the country. It marked the revival of a project that repositions the State as a driver of development and

recognizes that there is no true development without democracy, and no full democracy without development with social inclusion, without hunger and with the effective guarantee of the constitutional right to health. It is a project that restores investment in infrastructure, reindustrialization based on technology and innovation, and above all, values labor and its people.

This national reconstruction effort, however, does not occur in a vacuum. It clashes directly with forces of backwardness and with an international order still reluctant to accept diverse paths. The main challenge to national sovereignty and democracy today stems from attempts to preserve unipolar hegemony that refuses to accept the emergence of a healthy multipolar world.

This new multipolar reality, driven by nations such as China, Russia, India, South Africa and Brazil, especially within the BRICS framework, is the most relevant geopolitical fact of our time. It opens a window of opportunity for Global South countries to pursue their own development models according to their realities and the aspirations of their peoples. The right of each nation to freely choose its path, its model of democracy and its development strategy is a non-negotiable principle that we must collectively defend.

It is precisely for this reason that hegemonic forces react so aggressively. The foreign policy of Donald Trump's administration, for example, represents the most explicit face of this imperialist reaction. Its attacks against Latin America, whether through the intensification of the criminal blockade against Cuba or through the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife and Congresswoman Cilia Flores, are attempts to restore the old "backyard doctrine" or Monroe doctrine, subordinating our region to narrow interests.

In this conflicted world, no struggle stands alone. Solidarity among peoples is a duty of democrats. And there is no cause more urgent and more compelling to the conscience of humanity than that of the Palestinian people.

What is happening in Gaza and the West Bank, carried out by the colonial State of Israel with the explicit support of imperialism, is a

crime of genocide. It is a policy of ethnic cleansing aimed at rendering the Palestinian people and their right to a national state unviable. From Brazil, President Lula's voice has risen in courageous denunciation of this barbarity, and we stand with him. We defend the immediate end of the massacre, the full recognition of the sovereign and independent State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and that the neo-fascist government of Benjamin Netanyahu, which shames humanity, be held accountable for its crimes before the International Court of Justice.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To fight for democracy and development is to fight for the health of our peoples. It is to defend a concept of health that goes far beyond the absence of disease. Health means the right to housing, work, a dignified wage, water, clothing, education, and access to information, knowledge that enables people to understand the world and transform it.

Health is democracy; it is freedom; it is the right to a political system that respects freedom of opinion and the free possibility of organization and self-determination of its people.

In Brazil, President Lula prioritizes poverty reduction, job and income generation, support for family farming, strengthening school meals, and access to healthy food. As a result, in 2025 Brazil once again exited the Hunger Map.

President Lula conceived the Health Economic-Industrial Complex Policy, which articulates public health policies of the Unified Health System (SUS) with industrial policies, promoting innovation and local production of medicines, vaccines and equipment, with the objective of guaranteeing health sovereignty and driving economic development.

Here I would like to highlight the important and strategic partnership and cooperation between Brazil and India in the health sector. Last Tuesday, at the Embassy of India in Brazil, the newly created Brazilian Association of the Indian Pharmaceutical Industry was

presented—an organization that brings together Indian suppliers providing more affordable medicines to the Brazilian market.

As a result of this historic and strategic partnership between the Brazilian and Indian peoples, President Lula will be in India starting February 18, next week.

President Lula has also reinstated and strengthened the Popular Pharmacy Program of Brazil, which expands access for the Brazilian population to essential medicines and health supplies, completely free of charge. The program offers 39 medications, adult diapers, and sanitary pads to guarantee women’s menstrual dignity. This is made possible through partnerships with private pharmacies accredited by the federal government. The program is now present in 85% of municipalities, with the potential to serve 96% of the Brazilian population.

Through the Unified Health System, which recently completed 35 years, Brazil has been transforming the profile of its diseases. At this historic moment, oncology policy has taken a significant leap forward, with programs and actions that provide greater access to the most advanced and costly technologies.

One example is anthracyclines, which Indian industry supplies to the Unified Health System at more affordable prices, allowing Brazil to treat more women diagnosed with cancer.

Brazil’s Unified Health System is universal and free of charge. It ensures social participation in its governance, is based on scientific evidence, and is hierarchical and decentralized. It encompasses programs and services that promote equity and is present throughout the national territory, articulating the knowledge of managers, health workers, scientists, academia and the Brazilian people.

One of its greatest current challenges is reducing waiting lists for elective surgeries and access to specialized care. President Lula, under the coordination of Minister of Health Alexandre Padilha, is leading the program “Now There Are Specialists,” which operates from consultation to treatment. In 2025, the program reached a record by performing more than 14.5 million elective surgeries.

Other achievements of the Unified Health System fill us with pride. Programs such as “More Doctors” now include more than 27,000 physicians providing assistance in the most remote areas of the country. Today, more than 60,000 family health teams deliver care to all Brazilians, including Indigenous peoples living in Indigenous Health Districts. The “Smiling Brazil” program is present in 5,178 municipalities, expanding access to oral health services.

I also highlight our public policies and actions to combat HIV, which earned Brazil certification for eliminating vertical transmission of the virus.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The challenges are immense. Our struggle for a developed, sovereign and healthy Brazil is part of the global struggle for a multipolar world of peace, cooperation and respect among peoples. The experience of Kerala, which constantly seeks renewal in shaping its development path, inspires us.

May this conference strengthen our ties and our conviction that another world is possible—a world in which democracy is not merely a formal procedure, but the real power of the people, and where development serves human emancipation, the happiness of nations, and the health of humanity.

Thank you very much.

**Intervention by Mr. Augusto Viana Da Rocha, public health specialist, researcher at the University of Brasília and Primary Health Care Analyst at the Ministry of Health of Brazil, at Vision 2031: International Conference on Development and Democracy, organized by the Government of Kerala, India, in the Health and Nutrition Session, on February 16, 2026.*

