



PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT on the occasion of the ECOSOC Briefing on

Joining Forces: Effective Policy Solutions for Covid-19 Response (11 May 2020)

As of 11 May 2020, over 4 million cases of COVID-19 have been reported to WHO, and almost 275,000 lives were lost. I express my deepest condolences to the victims of COVID-19 and their families and extend the solidarity of participants in the ECOSOC briefing to all the affected people and Governments. As President of the Economic and Social Council, I convened this briefing to bring together the leadership and expertise of the wider UN system to discuss policy solutions for an inclusive, and truly human-centric COVID-19 response. Member States had an opportunity to hear from the UN Deputy Secretary-General, the executive heads of WHO, FAO, ILO, UNCTAD, ESCAP and the High Commissioner on Human Rights, as well as DESA and Plan International.

In my statement, I said: “This pandemic has put a spotlight on the need to strengthen multilateral cooperation, governance, and above, all global solidarity. At the individual level we show our solidarity by staying at home – if we can - and helping our communities. At the international level we show solidarity through multilateralism and working together. Drawing on each of our strengths to find a solution for a more resilient future. As the centre of the UN development system, ECOSOC brings people and issues together to promote collective action for a sustainable world. We must work together to deepen our efforts during this Decade of Action - to recover better, and build a: healthier, greener, fairer and a more resilient world.”

I am pleased to share the following key messages and recommendations that emerged from our discussions during the meeting:

- The world is facing an unprecedented threat from COVID-19. We must put people at the centre of crisis response and recovery to achieve better, more equitable and resilient outcomes for all. We must get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals we committed to.
- The diverging trends among countries call for a tailored response, inspired by the [WHO Global Strategy to Respond to COVID-19](#). This response must mobilize all sectors and communities; control sporadic cases and clusters rapidly; suppress community transmission through context-appropriate infection prevention and control measures; reduce mortality by providing appropriate care; and develop safe and effective vaccines and therapeutics. Further mobilization of funding is critical for the recently launched Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator to speed up the search for a vaccine and medicines, and ensure equitable access for everyone.
- Strong and resilient health systems are the best defense against outbreaks and pandemics. To this end, health must be seen as an investment, not a cost to the economy.
- Pre-existing inequalities along various dimensions are differentiating the impacts of COVID-19. We urgently need to focus on the most vulnerable people, who are more likely to suffer devastating losses from this pandemic. Poverty could rise by millions for the first time in three decades. Violence against women and girls, and particularly domestic violence, has intensified.
- All human rights must be respected, and measures must be lawful, necessary, proportionate, time-bound and justified by public health objectives. We must leave no one behind, including women, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants, minorities and LGBTI people.
- We need to expand systems for the universal provision of quality social services such as health care, education, sanitation and social protection; identify and empower vulnerable groups; and invest in jobs and livelihoods. It is critical to act through the multilateral system to respond to disparities across countries. ILO estimates the loss of jobs for the second quarter of 2020 to be equivalent to 305 million full-time jobs around the world. Urgent measures are needed to keep small enterprises alive and retain jobs, and support informal workers, that are largely concentrated in developing countries.
- The pandemic has put a spotlight on the care economy and care workers, who are mostly undervalued in the world of work. Women, who constitute 70 percent of care workers, must be at the centre of reorganizing the care economy. Measures to protect and stimulate the economy, from cash transfers to credits and loans, must be targeted

at women who make up the majority of those in the hardest-hit informal economy, and who are at the forefront of the community response.

- A sustainable recovery must deal with pre-existing vulnerabilities and financial challenges, while addressing direct consequences of COVID-19. A comprehensive approach to alleviate the debt burden of countries would include a debt moratorium, and address the issue of debt sustainability as well as structural issues in the international debt architecture.
- The pandemic has also revealed the huge digital divide among and within countries, as well as the gender digital divide. While some countries quickly moved to e-learning, cashless economies, e-governments, others have been left behind. Addressing the digital divide requires investment in physical infrastructure and skills-building along with strengthening privacy laws.
- We must prevent and control the impact of COVID-19 on hunger. Food systems need to remain functional as countries tackle the impacts of COVID-19. Innovation must be scaled up in agriculture, including digitalization and e-commerce; to produce more food, in a more sustainable way; safeguarding biodiversity. This would require changing current business models.
- Building resilience at all levels, including household, community, national, sub-regional and regional level, must be a priority. These include not only social protection measures, but also early warning system systems at country and sub-regional levels. At the regional level, issue-based coalitions have been particularly helpful in addressing inter-connected challenges, for example climate change and mitigation, inclusion and empowerment. It would be important to strengthen and leverage the work of the UN organizations, including regional commissions.
- Greater mobilization and international support are needed for the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund to help catalyze joint action by UN country teams to support the most vulnerable countries and communities. The needs of conflict- and disaster-affected countries, Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States must be met.
- The UN has mobilized the full capacity of the UN system in countries to immediately support national authorities in developing public health preparedness and response plans. The UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) launched a United Nations global framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, complementing the UN health response, led by WHO, as well as the humanitarian response detailed in the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan. Those endeavors must be adequately funded.
- The UN response, under the leadership of the strengthened Resident Coordinator system, is bringing the policy expertise from across the UN system to support Governments with the difficult trade-offs needed to help sustain progress against the pandemic over time without deepening economic and social instability and environmental degradation. Established and new modalities are being utilized for rapid funding of COVID-19 related programmes in countries. The response also reflects stronger partnerships with International Financial Institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, academia and the scientific community. Some donors' flexibility in the use of resources has allowed the UN system to reprioritize and provide the support where most needed.
- The United Nations system remains fully committed to support Governments and ensure that lives are saved, livelihoods are restored, financial resources are mobilized, and that the global economy and the people can emerge stronger from this crisis.
- Our response must be guided by the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. We must protect hard won progress made on the SDGs and continue addressing gaps and obstacles, so as to kick off the decade of action and acceleration. We must urgently address climate change and reverse the loss of biodiversity.
- We can only succeed in controlling the pandemic and its impacts, through a coordinated multilateral response, strong political will and leadership and global solidarity with the poorest and most vulnerable countries and people. The global response must get back on track towards multilateral approaches. Governments need to engage all parts of society, including the poorest and the most vulnerable, for effective and legitimate policies and to build back better. Partnerships with civil society and the private sector will be critical.
- The Economic and Social Council, as an inclusive intergovernmental platform, will continue to engage and mobilize governments, the UN system, civil society and young people around the world to facilitate sharing of experiences and learning to help put countries back on track to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.