



Joint Meeting of the Economic and Social Council and the Peacebuilding Commission

“Fostering global solidarity and conflict-sensitive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts”

Thursday, 19 November 2020

Informal Summary

The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), H.E. Mr. Munir Akram (Pakistan), and the Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), H.E. Mr. Bob Rae (Canada), co-chaired the annual joint meeting of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) on “*Fostering global solidarity and conflict sensitive responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impacts*” on 19 November 2020. Member States from the two intergovernmental bodies, UN entities, as well as other stakeholders attended the meeting. In addition to the opening remarks by the ECOSOC President, the PBC Chair and the Security Council President, the Deputy Secretary-General delivered a recorded message. This was followed by briefings by the incoming President of the High-Level Committee on South-South Cooperation (SSC), senior representatives of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and an advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and member of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The meeting focused on ways to forge solidarity, increase awareness of multidimensional challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic for sustainable development and peacebuilding, and develop coordinated and coherent conflict-sensitive responses to the pandemic, with emphasis on predictable and sustained financing.

Rethinking responses to COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

In his opening remarks, the President of ECOSOC, H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, underscored that COVID-19 was the worst pandemic in a century, and there was a need to understand its impact on the global economy, especially on the poorest countries and the most vulnerable people who have suffered the most. The first priority should be to control and defeat the virus; some countries had done well in this regard, whereas others had not. No one would be immune or safe until all are safe, and hopefully the discipline required would be exercised until a vaccine is developed. The resurgence of the virus underscored the need for continued vigilance and preparedness, especially in conflict-affected countries. It would also be essential to rebuild better and greener from the pandemic and endeavor to keep the achievement of the SDGs on track. He called for increased financing from all sources and multilateral approaches to addressing the pandemic, and noted that the entire intergovernmental machinery, including the PBC and ECOSOC and the Security Council, could come together to bring integrated, durable and innovative solutions to address multidimensional challenges. He emphasized the importance of debt relief and restructuring, the creation of new SDR and repurposing of the existing ones, and establishment of a liquidity and sustainability facility to provide necessary fiscal space for developing countries to fight the

Pandemic. “Conflict-affected countries are where the success of the SDGs will be determined”, the ECOSOS President said, “this is why a conflict-sensitive COVID-19 recovery is so urgent.” The President also called for universal acceptance of Secretary General’s call for Global Ceasefire.

The Chair of the PBC, H.E. Mr. Bob Rae, stated that the PBC has been extraordinarily active in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the abilities of governments and their partners to deliver on national peacebuilding priorities. In most countries and regions under the Commission’s consideration, COVID-19 had exacerbated inequalities and violence against women, while dealing a catastrophic blow to livelihoods, social cohesion and trust in governance institutions. Many countries, after decades of international peacebuilding support and gains, seemed to be one or two shocks away from falling into deep crisis. He called for fundamentally rethinking approaches and putting livelihoods, economic security for citizens, and inclusive development at the heart of peacebuilding. The success of mitigating measures and building back better would determine the extent to which the root causes of conflict are addressed as part of a multidimensional and people-centered humanitarian and development response, within the framework of the SDGs. The crisis, with its enormous human costs, had reinforced the need for global solidarity to address the present health and humanitarian crisis and to build durable peace and sustainable development. It had also reinforced the need for enhanced collaboration between the ECOSOC and the PBC to support a robust global response and recovery, including mobilization of the necessary financial resources that ensures that countries affected by conflict are not left behind.

The President of the Security Council, H.E. Ms. Inga Rhonda King, said that in the face of pandemic-induced challenges, the international community must develop comprehensive approaches to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity, strengthen national ownership over peace processes and enhance inclusivity. For its part, the Security Council, through its resolution 2532 (2020), had reinforced the Secretary-General’s call for immediate global ceasefire to allow for humanitarian aid to be delivered. She underscored the mutual goals of the international community regarding COVID-19 and peacebuilding. “Council Members are united in our calls for adequately financed, integrated and sustainable approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in line with the principles of international law.”

In a recorded message, the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina Mohammed, underscored that the COVID-19 pandemic was driving fragility and conflict. Emphasizing the need for collaboration between humanitarian, development and peace actors, at all levels, to leave no one behind, she noted that both the ECOSOC and the PBC have a clear, interconnected role to play and identified three areas of improvement for greater interlinkages. She noted that the organs must reconcile short-term humanitarian and stabilization needs with longer-term peacebuilding and development processes. A new generation of cooperation frameworks resulting from the 2016 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) had already equipped the United Nations system to achieve lasting impact in contexts where development and peace efforts are integrated. Member States were currently negotiating resolutions on the 2020 QCPR and the Peacebuilding Architecture Review (PBAR) that should lead to greater coherence, accelerate efforts towards the SDGs and continue to focus on preventing multidimensional risks.

Strengthening responses to COVID-19 related challenges

The incoming President of the United Nations High-level Committee on SSC, H.E. Ms. María del Carmen Squeff (Argentina), said that through South-South and triangular cooperation, its guiding

principles and framework for sharing of knowledge and good practices to improve outcomes, there is a real opportunity to turn the response to COVID-19 into a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable recovery, with a gender focus. The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation has been coordinating webinars for this purpose that are available through its website as a roadmap for the future and supporting systematic facilitation of SSC to implement peacebuilding priorities aligned with national development strategies.

The Special Representative of the IMF to the United Nations, Mr. Robert Powell, said that the IMF is projecting the sharpest decline in the world economy since the Great Depression, with millions falling into extreme poverty and women and youth disproportionately impacted. Fragile states with large informal sectors and a lack of digitalization had been hit particularly hard, especially by commodity price shocks. The IMF had undertaken an unprecedented response to help countries, specifically fragile and developing and indebted countries, recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, including by doubling access to emergency financing facilities, lending and debt relief. Working closely with the World Bank, it had continued to support the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative. In addition to investing in long-term financial infrastructure via training, oversight, and governance, providing capacity building assistance to fragile states continued to be a main priority of the IMF.

The Deputy Director of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Ahmed Ogwell Ouma, said that Africa has recorded 2 million cases of COVID-19 and 48,000 fatalities for a mortality rate of 2.4 per cent. Lessons drawn from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and the Democratic Republic of the Congo made it possible for the continent to respond more effectively to COVID-19. Coordination among African countries was unprecedented, with Heads of State and health ministers meeting several times since the pandemic began. The African Union's adoption of the Africa Joint Continental Strategy for COVID-19 Outbreak in early February had averted many deaths and mitigated the social and economic impact of the pandemic. The region's preemptive and coordinated response had been an excellent demonstration of solidarity in difficult times and had led to the development of a lasting infrastructure and response strategy that can be employed against future pandemics.

Ms. Hindou Ibrahim, SDG Advocate and Co-Chair of the International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change, stated that the effects of the pandemic on the Sahel region were exacerbating the ongoing economic crises, conflict between communities and shortage of medical capacities, disproportionately affecting indigenous populations and poorest women and girls. The lockdown measures and closing of borders were particularly harsh on daily sources of income and the ability to move freely for food and when grazing cattle. Humanitarian assistance is a classical response but not a sustainable solution. Weak health systems and a lack of digitalization also prevented indigenous and rural populations in the Sahel region from receiving adequate care. She recommended investing in health and sustainable food systems and increasing access to green energy, localizing the SDGs and allocating resources primarily towards rural areas, which represent 60 to 70 percent of the population for the Sahel region and up to 80 percent of the GDP.

Interventions from the floor

Member States welcomed the briefings and made the following recommendation:

- They reiterated that the COVID-19 pandemic had aggravated inequalities, harmed social cohesion, destabilized governance structures, disproportionately affected vulnerable groups

including women and youth, and reversed peace and development gains to such an extent that progress on many SDGs had been set back significantly. A robust and inclusive response to the pandemic provided a unique opportunity to rebuild better and get back on track during the Decade of Action to achieve the SDGs.

- They underscored the importance of multilateralism, protection of human rights and sustained financing for nationally-led, conflict-sensitive, climate-sensitive, and gender-responsive development. They called upon the ECOSOC and the PBC to cooperate in a manner that goes well beyond holding joint meetings and work together with the Security Council in a coherent manner. Some viewed the 2020 QCPR and PBAR as important opportunities to further accelerate efforts towards a more integrated approach to peacebuilding and sustainable development. In this context, they reiterated support for the Secretary-General's appeal for global solidarity, a global ceasefire and the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19. They also acknowledged the flexible and catalytic role of the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and the PBC Chair's invitation for the PBF Replenishment Conference in January 2021.
- They emphasized conflict-sensitive and context-specific inclusive responses, pointing to the specific needs of the Sahel and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) where climate change and extreme weather-related challenges exacerbate fragility, instability and conflict and inhibit efforts to respond effectively to the pandemic and its impacts. They argued that both an effective humanitarian response to the COVID-19 crisis and building back better must respond to the priorities of the Governments involved, ensure resilience to both health and environmental risks, focus on sustainable peace and people-centered justice, promote digital connectivity, prevent social tensions, promote inclusive processes, and help communities adapt to new sources of income. It was noted that attention must also be paid to unilateral coercive measures, which are undermining countries' ability to fight COVID-19.
- Many Member States highlighted the resource demands and constraints they faced in fashioning effective response to COVID-19, on top of existing fiscal constraints and the heavy burden of external debts. They advocated for social protection, debt relief and adequate financial resources to not only tackle the virus, but also its socio-economic impacts, such as inequality, shrinking fiscal space, external indebtedness and the overarching threat of climate change that is aggravating the situation in all regions. Furthermore, scaling up financing from all sources and localizing COVID-19 relief packages to target rural areas were considered primary. The need to put economic recovery at the heart of peacebuilding was underscored throughout the meeting, as peace cannot prevail without sustainable development and sustainable development cannot be achieved without peace. Speakers called for 'building forward better.' In this connection, the role of the World Bank, the IMF and other international financial institutions was stressed while also emphasizing the need for them to build on UN expertise, especially at the country level.
- Recognizing the need for a well-funded and coordinated multilateral global response to COVID-19 challenges and ongoing financing efforts to support a sustainable economic recovery and enduring peacebuilding efforts, Member States recalled individual (India, the Netherlands, Republic of Korea) as well as collective (Nordic countries, EU) contributions, including to the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and its COVAX Facility, to ensure adequate distribution of vaccine for those in need, including in conflict-affected countries, to the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund and the PBF. Others referred to deployment of medical teams and equipment to developing countries and other contributions.