



ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

**Remarks by the President of the ECOSOC During Security Council Debate:
Contemporary Drivers of Conflict
November 3, 2020**

**Your Excellency, Honorable Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines,
Distinguished Deputy Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great privilege to be asked to brief the Security Council on the timely topic of the contemporary drivers of conflict.

May I first congratulate Saint Vincent and the Grenadines on assuming the Council's Presidency and convening this important debate.

The concept of collective security enshrined in the UN Charter, from which the Security Council draws the authority conferred on it by Member States, is accompanied by the parallel objectives, set out in Article 55, to create conditions of peace and stability “ which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self determination of peoples”. These objectives include:

- a. Higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development;
- b. Solutions to economic, social, health and related problems, and
- c. Universal respect for human rights.

Although little noted and never utilized, Article 65 of the Charter provides that the Economic and Social Council “may furnish information to the Security Council and shall assist the Security Council upon its request”

The Charter’s framers clearly conceived that the United Nations would both collectively maintain and enforce peace as well as “create” the “conditions for peace and stability”.

Speaking at the Bretons Woods Conference, United State President Roosevelt emphasized the essence of collective economic security. He said:

“ Economic Diseases are highly communicable. It follows therefore that the economic health of every country is a proper matter of concern to all its neighbors, near and distant. Only through a dynamic and a soundly expanding world economy can the living standards of individual nations be advanced to levels which will permit a full realization of our hopes for the future”.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

In the seventy-five years since the Charter’s adoption, the UN’s Member States have failed to live up to the ideals of collective and cooperative security proclaimed by those who conceived the United Nations. Several reasons can be offered to explain this failure.

First, the Cold War intruded into the vision of universal and cooperative security. The world was effectively divided into rival camps. The Marshall Plan rehabilitated US-allied Europe only and later Japan.

Second, the rapid process of decolonization did not entirely eliminate the legacy and mentality of colonialism. The decolonization process left behind unequal post-colonial societies and their continued economic, trade and, often, political and military dependence on former colonial powers. The post-1945 military, political and economic structures and institutions reflected this embedded inequality.

Third, and perhaps most important, state power, especially in the most powerful countries, was captured by mercantilist interests, prioritizing profits over the common good and the Charter's vision of collective economic security.

The cumulative outcome is a world quite unlike that visualized by the Founders of the United Nations. In his Nelson Mandela address earlier this year, our Secretary General observed that: "Inequality is the hallmark of our times" yes so it is, when the 26 richest people own half the world's wealth.

The origins of many if not most of the plethora of conflicts and disputes, which are on the Agenda of the Security Council, can be traced to this unequal world order.

The root causes of these conflicts range from the internal struggles for scarce resources; external contests for precious natural resources, and interventions designed to suppress the struggle of peoples to reclaim their own political and economic destinies.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

It is in this milieu of inequality that the world has been hit by the worst pandemic since 1916 and the worst recession since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The world economy is projected to contract by 5-10 percent, depending on when the virus can be brought under control.

As usual, the poorest countries and the poorest peoples will suffer the most. Over a 100 million will be pushed back into poverty. While the rich have pumped in over \$13 trillion to stimulate their economies, the poor are searching for ways to mobilize the \$2-3 trillion they need to keep their economies afloat. Unless they are helped to find this money, many developing economies- with lost revenues and laden with unplayable debt- are likely to face economic collapse. This would spread chaos and further inflame regional conflicts and global tensions.

As early as April, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Imran Khan, called for Global Debt Relief for the developing countries. In May, the Secretary General, together with the Prime Ministers of Canada and Jamaica, launched the timely financing for development process. This process has identified 260 options for action. But so far sadly response of those in a position to act on these options has been extremely modest and disappointing.

International community must mobilize the political will to implement some of the most important of these options:

- a. Debt Suspension for low income and those SIDS under stress until the end of the pandemic;

- b. Cancellation of Least Developing Countries debt;
- c. Debt restructuring for other developing countries, including through efficient debt buy backs and swaps;
- d. Sizable Net inflows from Multilateral Development Banks;
- e. Vastly expanded concessional financing through IDA and other sources;
- f. Fulfillment of the 0.7 pc ODA commitment;
- g. Private sector participation in debt suspension and relief; and
- h. Most importantly, the issue of new SDRs and the repurposing of unutilized SDR quotas for SDG investment.

Excellencies,

Our Secretary General has declared that this crisis offers an opportunity to “ Build Back Better” and realize the SDGs and the goals of the Paris Climate Agreements. Others have picked up the Secretary General’s slogan.

However, we will be unable to achieve these ambitious and vital objectives unless we address and redress the structural inequalities which have led us into the current and previous financial and economic crises.

Structural reforms are needed and they must encompass:

- a. a reform of the financial architecture to enhance access of developing countries to adequate SDG-linked financing;
- b. An inclusive, equitable and transparent debt management mechanism;
- c. Preferential banking regulations for developing countries;
- d. A fair international tax regime;

- e. An end to illicit financial flows from developing countries;
- f. A new and democratic trade regime which reverses the restrictive measures imposed by the major economies, restores the WTO's adjudication system and places the SDGs at the core of trade objectives;
- g. Mobilization of at least \$2 trillion investment annually in sustainable infrastructure in developing countries, and
- h. Preferential access for developing countries to the latest technologies especially to bridge the digital divide.

Excellencies,

Unless we can mobilize the political will to implement these goals of equitable and inclusive development, it is unlikely that we will be able to agree to take the ambitious collective actions required to avoid the existential threat posed by climate change. Destitute developing countries struggling for economic survival will be in no position to make a “new Green Deal”.

The ECOSOC will attempt to advance these essential actions in its Financing for Development (FFD) Forum next April and the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) next July.

It is imperative that today, 75 years after the adoption of the UN Charter, we do not fail again to reflect the vision of collective economic security. Never before in human history has the well being and survival of humans depended so much on the actions and decisions of each other.

Excellencies,

In these turbulent times, United Nations is the only universally acceptable instrument available to Member States to address the “ contemporary drivers of conflict”. We must rely on the vision and courage of our Secretary General and of Member States to chart a clear and bold course to respond to the multiple challenges we face simultaneously. The UN system has the capacity, if mobilized, to support this epic endeavor for global peace and security, for equitable and inclusive development and for smooth and early transition to a sustainable global economic, social and political order.

I thank you.