



Call to Action in support of the humanitarian response in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic

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As the world faces the unprecedented challenge of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, we must commit to act with urgency and determination to respond to this crisis. We must recommit to doing so through international solidarity, cooperation, unity and humanity.

We must take action now to respond with urgency and determination to meet humanitarian needs and prevent and mitigate further devastating humanitarian impacts of this pandemic. We must support those living in humanitarian contexts, who are among the most vulnerable to consequences of the disease, including women and children, older persons, persons with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, who are disproportionately impacted by this pandemic.

Currently, there are over 7.1 million confirmed cases and over 408,000 deaths worldwide (as of 11 June 2020). We need to prepare for an increase in the pandemic's impact in some of the world's poorest countries and especially those affected by humanitarian crises.

We are deeply concerned about the devastating impacts that we are already seeing on some of the world's most vulnerable populations and countries, where the pandemic is exacerbating high levels of pre-existing humanitarian needs, with more than 100 million people already in dire need of life-saving humanitarian assistance. We are seeing poverty levels growing, food supplies falling and prices soaring, children missing vaccinations, meals, and schooling, while sexual and gender-based violence are increasing.

This pandemic calls for a concerted, coordinated global response based on unity, solidarity and international cooperation and effective multilateralism. Humanitarian assistance is a critical part of that response. We call for intensification of cooperation and collaboration at all levels to contain, control and mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

We commend the humanitarian system's coordinated response to avert a sharp rise in hunger, poverty, violence and disease as a result of the pandemic and the associated global recession. We commend the efforts and commitment of the Member States, the United Nations and health and humanitarian organizations and personnel on the ground, including the efforts of local, national and international non-governmental organizations, working on the front lines against the pandemic.

Determined steps are needed to address the challenges of this pandemic. We therefore call for the following concrete and practical actions:

1. We urge Member States and other potential donors to support the scaling up of emergency efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and consider funding with urgency the Global Humanitarian Response Plan to meet its requirements. We must act now and put in place the necessary early action and preparedness measures to save lives and prevent future hardship and suffering. Funding should be rapid and flexible to enable a fast and effective response. It should not replace or divert resources from the response to existing humanitarian needs unrelated to COVID-19. We also urge further support to local, national and international humanitarian non-governmental organizations, and other relevant actors, as appropriate, who play an important role in humanitarian response. We also recognize and support the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and Country-based Pooled Funds, which have already played a key role in the humanitarian response, and will continue to. What has been achieved so far has been possible because of the generous funding - we must continue through additional funding that is proportionate to the scale of the problem we face and which maintains funding for pre-existing humanitarian needs. We are only as strong as the world's weakest health system. None of us will be safe until we are all safe.
2. We therefore call upon Member States to work closely with the UN and to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance. This includes fast tracking the passage of health and humanitarian personnel at borders and in-country and ensuring their health, safety and wellbeing. Without such access and movement, humanitarian assistance may be unable to reach those in need, increasing humanitarian suffering and loss of life and needs of affected people may be exacerbated, as service provision declines, humanitarian suffering and loss of life will escalate and funding requirements will increase. This includes the safe and unhindered access and movement of health and humanitarian personnel and goods, including expedited customs procedures for medical supplies and equipment such as ventilators, personal protective equipment and other health and humanitarian goods. We urge Member States to support, facilitate and enable expeditious and effective supply lines for humanitarian goods and personnel, and avoid restrictions or barriers to humanitarian supply chains that would delay or impede humanitarian assistance.
3. Health and humanitarian personnel should be designated as essential workers, given their direct and indispensable role in delivering life-saving assistance. It is also critical to reaffirm and adhere to the humanitarian principles.
4. We underscore that respect for international law, including international humanitarian law, is essential to contain and mitigate outbreaks of COVID-19. We condemn acts of violence, attacks and threats directed against health and humanitarian personnel.
5. We also call upon Member States and other relevant stakeholders to take steps to prevent, within their respective legal frameworks, speculation and undue stockpiling that may hinder access to safe, effective and affordable essential medicines, vaccines, personal protective equipment and medical equipment, as well as other humanitarian supplies and equipment as may be required to effectively address COVID-19. We call for the universal, timely and equitable access to and fair distribution of all quality, safe, efficacious and affordable essential health technologies and products, including their component and precursors that are required in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic as a global priority, and the urgent removal of unjustified obstacles thereto.

6. We must ensure gender-responsive humanitarian response and stress that responses to the COVID-19 should address the specific needs of women and girls, including by preventing and responding to increasing levels of sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of violence, exploitation and abuse. We must recognize how COVID-19 is exacerbating existing vulnerabilities among women and girls. We also call on all relevant actors to recognize and ensure women's and girl's full, active and meaningful participation and leadership in the immediate response and longer-term recovery.
7. We also urge for maintaining continuity of humanitarian assistance which is especially necessary to protect children from violence, abuse or exploitation, to ensure the health, safety and well-being of children, including vaccination programs and access to education. While children are not considered to be the most affected by the direct effects of this pandemic, its broader impacts on children risk being catastrophic and amongst the most lasting consequences for societies as a whole. Children face increased risks of sexual exploitation and abuse, abduction, child labor, child forcible recruitment, child early and forced marriage and other forms of violence. Children with disabilities are among those most dependent on face-to-face care, including health and education, which have been suspended as part of social distancing and lockdown measures.
8. We also underscore the need for disability and age inclusive humanitarian response to the COVID-19 pandemic that addresses the specific needs of persons with disabilities and older persons. Older persons are among the most visible victims of this crisis but their specific needs are often overlooked. Persons with disabilities are at increased risk of neglect and abuse and face a range of physical, institutional and social barriers in accessing life-saving assistance including water and sanitation and public health. In addition, preexisting stigmatizing and social exclusion of persons with disabilities risks being exacerbated as a result of COVID-19.
9. We urge Member States, the United Nations and humanitarian organizations to increase efforts to provide cross-sectoral mental health and psychosocial support services that are integrated into humanitarian programmes for preparedness, response and recovery to meet the needs of affected populations, which are vital in overcoming the additional psychological and psychosocial distress experienced as a result of COVID-19 and supporting recovery and people's resilience. People in humanitarian contexts whose mental health and psychosocial needs are often overlooked require more attention; and the pandemic risks exacerbating existing mental health conditions, inducing new conditions and limiting access to the already scarce mental health and psychosocial services.
10. We urge further action to address the humanitarian impacts of rising global severe acute food insecurity, exacerbated by recent locust infestations in some developing countries, in the face of the pandemic, which is driving significantly higher levels of food insecurity, especially for women and children. People likely to face the most severe impacts are those who were already acutely poor and food insecure prior to COVID-19, and who rely on humanitarian assistance, remittances and seasonal migration, or daily informal labour markets.
11. We underscore that coherent and complementary needs analysis and planning between humanitarian and development actors are more important than ever. We must ensure efforts are made to support strengthening health systems so that they can be better prepared for future disease outbreaks. We urge continued coherence and collaboration across the UN system in its response to COVID-19, as well as strengthened collaboration with international financial institutions. We stress the need for coordinated efforts of all relevant

United Nations system entities to address the COVID-19 outbreak, in line with their respective mandates, and for them to accelerate their response to the pandemic.

- 12.** We urge all to heed the relevant calls by the Secretary-General's to address Covid-19, including the Call for an immediate global cease-fire so as to lessen the devastating humanitarian impacts of armed conflicts and to enable greater focus on responding to the pandemic.
- 13.** We reiterate the importance of a continued coherent UN-led humanitarian response. As the 75th Anniversary of the United Nation approaches, this pandemic has served to underscore that international cooperation and the role of the United Nations is more vital than ever. The devastating impacts of this pandemic may cause more people to be affected in humanitarian crises - we must do all we can now in partnership to prevent, mitigate, respond and prepare. It remains vital for the UN also to continue to build its partnerships and work with relevant actors, including non-governmental organizations and civil society, the private sector and international financial institutions for they are vital partners in the fight against this pandemic. Together we must continue to strengthen prevention, preparedness and humanitarian response in the fight against this pandemic.