

2020 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment
High-Level Panel
“Addressing the increasing complexity of health challenges in humanitarian contexts”
Tuesday 9 June, 10:00am-12:30pm (New York time), Virtual

Objectives

The United Nations Secretary-General has called COVID-19 the most serious challenge the United Nations has faced since its creation. Humanitarians have moved quickly to adapt to a new and increasingly complex reality in a world where more than 160 million people were already in need of humanitarian assistance as 2020 began.

This panel will focus on critical next steps needed to better respond to increasing needs, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic; recognizing the evolving landscaped marked in recent years by disease outbreaks and epidemics often in conflict settings. The panelists will discuss how international actors are coping with new challenges identifying emerging needs, access challenges and delivering by remote. In addition, they will discuss how to anchor these new approaches in humanitarian principles in a context where needs are driven by an ever more complex mix of health, economic, and development crises.

Panelists will discuss the measures that are needed to lower the human costs of these new dynamics, providing first-hand examples of how they are managing to deliver in such challenging environments. They will describe ways they are meeting the urgent existing needs, even as the COVID-19 threatens to drive already historic levels of hunger to new extremes and reverse development gains. Based on lessons learned from previous responses to epidemics, they will also share suggestions for facilitating the flow of humanitarian and medical supplies to where they are most needed and maintaining the global supply chain for humanitarian and medical goods and services. Finally, panelists will also discuss the pandemic’s Mental Health and Psycho-Social (MHPSS) impacts and solutions for affected people, and for front-line humanitarian workers and volunteers.

Background and theme

Humanitarians are especially concerned about the impact COVID-19 will have on fragile countries with weak health systems and vulnerable populations, particularly in camps or camplike settings and on malnourished children and on those with chronic diseases.

The severity of the crisis is reflected in the rapid growth in needs. At the beginning of 2020, humanitarian agencies requested \$28 billion to assist more than 100 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance in 2020. By 7 May, with the spread of the impact of COVID-19, those numbers grew by an additional \$6.69 billion, covering 63 countries. The revised United Nations Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP) sets out a course of action to assist the ultra-vulnerable – millions upon millions of people who are among the least able to protect themselves.

In humanitarian contexts, the COVID-19 pandemic compounds humanitarian needs in some of the worst and most complex emergencies, requiring more resources and making responses more complex. After striking first in the some of the world’s wealthiest countries, COVID-19 is now ravaging

countries where health systems are not as advanced, and where people have fewer coping mechanisms. In some cases, outbreaks are compounded by both for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) violations and weather events driven by climate change. At the ground level, impediments to humanitarian access, coupled with the direct and indirect impacts of attacks on water and sanitation infrastructure greatly complicated the response to urgent humanitarian needs. Attacks on healthcare facilities and health care workers slowed the initial response to the Ebola outbreak, and there are concerns this pattern could emerge in the COVID-19 context.

New approaches are being adapted for changing circumstances. Restrictions to the movement of urgently needed medical and humanitarian personnel and supplies are being modified. At the local level, the importance of involving communities before during and after outbreaks became clear in responding to outbreaks of Ebola in, for example, DRC. Agencies are focusing more on the pandemic's impacts on mental health and the need for psycho-social support (MHPSS), and the importance of building the resilience of affected communities who will play such a key role in recovery.

Guiding Questions:

- How are humanitarians balancing the need to assist over 100 million people already in acute humanitarian need with the growth in the number of people in humanitarian need due to the first order impacts of COVID-19? How is the humanitarian community preparing for the likely humanitarian consequences of the second order impacts of COVID-19?
- What concrete measures have been taken to support the humanitarian response to the Covid-19 pandemic? What more is needed?
- What factors are constraining humanitarian operations and what can be done?
- What is being done to address the food shortages driven by the health and economic crises across developing countries?
- How can humanitarians prepare better for health emergencies and pandemics? How might anticipatory action be used to greater effect in limiting the impact of disease outbreaks?
- How can communities best be involved in ensuring the effectiveness of responses to outbreaks?
- What more needs to be done to address Mental Health and psycho-social (MHPSS) impacts in humanitarian settings; which are compounded by health emergencies and by the instability and trauma wrought by COVID-19?

Panel

Chair:

- H.E. Mr. Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco and Vice-President of ECOSOC

Moderator:

- Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

Panellists:

- H.E. Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Netherlands Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation
- Dr. Ibrahima Socé-Fall, Assistant Director-General for Emergency Response, World Health Organization
- Mr. Amir Abdulla, Deputy Executive Director, World Food Programme
- Mr. Jagan Chapagain, Secretary General of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- Dr. Christos Christou, International President, Médecins Sans Frontiers
- Dr. Raji Tajudeen, Head, Public Health Institutes and Research, Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
- Ms. Atim Caroline Ogwang, Director, South Sudan Women with Disability Network