

ECOSOC HAS 2021 “Strengthening humanitarian assistance to face the challenges of 2021 and beyond: mobilizing respect for international humanitarian law, inclusion, gender, innovation and partnerships”

Statement by Norway

More than a year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impacts are still deeply felt in countries facing humanitarian crisis. Humanitarian needs are at record-high levels. There is a greater need to strengthen humanitarian assistance and find solutions to the drivers of armed conflict than ever before.

This year we mark five years of the Grand Bargain commitments. While there has been some progress, we are not where we should be. Norway remains committed to providing quality funding and supporting local humanitarian action. As we convene at ECOSOC HAS, let us use the opportunity to discuss how we can mobilise and reinforce humanitarian action.

We would like to highlight some areas of particular concern to Norway.

Firstly, the protection of health care has become even more critical in light of COVID-19. The pandemic poses challenges to health care delivery worldwide, particular in humanitarian settings. Safe access to health care, also in areas of armed conflict and beyond government control, is fundamental to the pandemic response.

Attacks on medical personnel and facilities exacerbate the difficult situation for people already in need. Full and unimpeded humanitarian access is necessary for COVID-19 vaccines to reach the most vulnerable populations. It is essential that countries and COVAX ensure vaccination of priority groups in humanitarian settings. We must maintain the operational capacity of humanitarian organisations and safeguard their independence.

Secondly, civilians must be protected. This is a priority and an entry point in Norway’s efforts to enhance compliance with international law, in our humanitarian policy, and in our work at the Security Council.

Norway strongly urges all parties to armed conflict to comply with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law. Allegations of violations of IHL must be thoroughly, impartially, and effectively investigated. Accountability for violations must be ensured through credible national or international criminal justice mechanisms.

In all conflicts, children pay a high price. We must ensure that children are better protected. Attacks on education and the COVID pandemic have increased absenteeism and led to school closures. Children have become even more vulnerable to a wide range of threats, including child marriage, child labour, sexual and gender-based violence and recruitment and use by armed forces and groups. The right to education must be upheld. Education protects children. We call on all states to endorse and implement the Safe Schools Declaration.

Thirdly, the widespread and increasing level of sexual and gender-based violence in humanitarian settings, intensified by the pandemic, is cause for grave concern. Perpetrators must be brought to

justice. There must be an end to the widespread use of sexual violence as a tool of political repression and a tactic of war and terror.

Addressing gender inequality, including its gendered drivers and recognition of the disproportionate impacts on women and girls, should be the backbone of our response. The participation of women in humanitarian response is critical. Overlooking the strength and agency of women, and neglecting to work with local women's organisations and female leaders, may heighten the risks that women and girls face.

Fourthly, we need to give priority to innovation. We believe that innovation will lead to better and more effective results for people affected by armed conflict and crisis, and will help to reduce the funding gap. Norway focuses on the fields of protection and green humanitarian response in its humanitarian innovation efforts.

Awareness of the environmental and climate-related aspects of humanitarian efforts has increased, and Norway requires its partners to choose sustainable and more environmentally friendly solutions for their operations. We need to accelerate progress towards safe access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy services by 2030.

Finally, there will be no progress in any of the areas mentioned here without strong partnerships. Strategic partnerships are essential if we are to succeed in making humanitarian protection and response more effective and flexible. This is also key to progress on the Grand Bargain commitments.

Let us take the opportunity the 2021 HAS offers us to reinforce our collective commitment to strengthening humanitarian action.

The ECOSOC humanitarian resolution is an important guiding document. Norway is pleased that it was possible to reach consensus on the resolution this year, including references to the COVID-19 pandemic. For us, it was important to achieve common recognition of the increase in sexual and gender-based violence as well as the negative impacts of the pandemic on girls' education. At the same time, we strongly regret the fact that women's rights to sexual and reproductive health continue to be challenged. We also regret that it was not possible to include stronger language on the importance of cooperation across the nexus. We see that it is proving difficult to make constructive progress each year, and we question the added value of the negotiation process. We therefore call on member states to consider making the ECOSOC resolution biennial.