



UN Monitor: COVID-19 Round-Up 23/04/2020

Member States adopted General Assembly Resolution “[International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19](#)” on 20 April under silence procedure. The resolution, [drafted by Mexico](#) and sponsored by 75 other delegations, states that the current crisis calls for:

- “rapidly scaling manufacturing and strengthening supply chains that promote and ensure fair, transparent, equitable, efficient and timely access to and distribution of preventive tools, laboratory testing, reagents and supporting materials, essential medical supplies, new diagnostics, drugs and future COVID-19 vaccines, with a view to making them available to all those in need, in particular in developing countries”.

In addition, the resolution:

- “Calls upon Member States and other relevant stakeholders to immediately 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 may be required to effectively address COVID-19;
- “Requests the Secretary-General, in close collaboration with the World Health Organization, to take the necessary steps to effectively coordinate and follow up on the efforts of the United Nations system to promote and ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment needed to face COVID-19.”

Pakistan joined the consensus but noted concerns in their [explanation of position](#), saying:

“However, we regret that the draft resolution could not include reference to ensure access to information, preventive and other health care for all persons arbitrarily deprived of their liberty especially those in regions under foreign occupation. Such reference would be in line with guidance issued by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and our agreed goal to leave no one behind and reach farthest behind first.

We also note that the resolution does not call for assurance of adequate financial resources to developing countries to enable them to meet the enormous challenges of addressing the health emergency and preserving sociology-economic development.”

Over 300 CSOs from all regions have issued a letter [calling on](#) the UN Secretary-General and the WHO Director-General “to secure binding commitments from biopharmaceutical and other manufacturers for access to affordable medical products”. Further, they call for “the sharing of knowledge and technology needed to ramp up production of much needed medical products”. Towards this end, the letter is calling for the operationalization of existing fair and equitable benefit sharing obligations of the Convention on Biological Diversity and its Nagoya Protocol, which are legally binding documents related to genetic materials including those for developing medical products.

Two additional draft resolutions related to COVID-19 have been introduced by Member States but failed to reach consensus and were not adopted. Silence procedure on both drafts was broken.

The first, "[United response against global health threats: combating COVID-19](#)": "reaffirms the necessity to support economies, protect workers, businesses, especially micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the sectors most affected, and shield the vulnerable through adequate social protection". It also "stresses the need to give appropriate consideration to the issue of halting and reversing the global threats posed by epidemics through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development".

The second, "[Declaration of solidarity of the United Nations in the face of the challenges posed by the coronavirus disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)" states:

"We call for the expansion of global manufacturing capacity to meet the increasing needs for medical products and equipment to cope with the pandemic, ensuring that essential medical supplies and pharmaceuticals are made widely available, at affordable prices, on an equitable basis, where they are most needed and as quickly as possible.

We invite the international financial institutions to support countries in need using all relevant financial instruments to the fullest extent, including addressing risks of debt vulnerabilities in low-income countries.

We are resolved to cooperate in addressing the disruptions to international trade and the market uncertainty due to the pandemic, mitigating the damage caused to the global economy by the spread of COVID-19, and promoting economic growth throughout the world, especially in developing countries."

The President of the General Assembly has [appointed co-facilitators](#) for COVID-19 Related Initiatives. The co-facilitators, Adela Raz of Afghanistan and Ivan Šimonović of Croatia will work with Member States to: "inter alia, facilitate the exchange of views, coordinate approaches and initiatives, as well as leverage the influence of the Assembly to effectively advocate for measures aimed at defeating COVID-19, while mitigating its social and economic impact".

A first order of business for the co-facilitators will include [a virtual town hall meeting](#) for Member States and Observer States, with participation limited to one person per delegation. The objective is to:

"discuss how the General Assembly could coordinate approaches and combine initiatives, as well as leverage its influence to effectively advocate for measures aimed at defeating COVID-19, while mitigating its social and economic impact. We invite you to share your views concerning which aspects of COVID-19's current and future challenges that still need to be addressed in a comprehensive and collective manner, among other things. We hope the meeting will be a first step in a meaningful, transparent and inclusive consultation process that may result in a comprehensive and action-oriented response by the Assembly."

In addition to Member State initiatives concerning COVID-19, Secretary-General António Guterres has highlighted the importance of human rights in COVID-19 responses and recovery. Introducing his [latest report](#) on the subject, he [stated](#):

“A human rights lens puts everyone in the picture and ensures that no one is left behind. Human rights responses can help beat the pandemic, putting a focus on the imperative of healthcare for everyone. But they also serve as an essential warning system — highlighting who is suffering most, why, and what can be done about it. We have seen how the virus does not discriminate, but its impacts do — exposing deep weaknesses in the delivery of public services and structural inequalities that impede access to them. We must make sure they are properly addressed in the response.”

At a virtual Financing for Development (FfD) Forum on 23 April, the Secretary-General [stated](#), “this is not only a health crisis but a human crisis; a jobs crisis; a humanitarian crisis and a development crisis. And it is not just about the most vulnerable. This pandemic shows that we are all at risk, because we are only as strong as the weakest health system.”

He also discussed the issue of debt burden, a long-standing issue on the UN’s Financing for Development agenda, saying:

“Beyond an initial debt moratorium, targeted debt relief will be needed. This should be followed by efforts to strengthen debt sustainability, including debt swaps, and a mechanism to address sovereign debt restructuring in a coordinated and comprehensive manner, that takes account of the need for countries to step up their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. We must also address structural issues in the international debt architecture, to prevent defaults leading to prolonged financial and economic crises”.

Further to Guterres’ call for a debt restructuring mechanism at the virtual FfD Forum, UNCTAD reiterated the call for a global deal [on](#) debt, saying “more systematic, transparent and coordinated measures towards writing off developing country debt across the board are urgently needed”.

The final FfD Forum [outcome document is available](#), along with a [response from CSOs](#), reiterating their call for an Economic Reconstruction Summit. At the virtual FfD Forum, the President of the Economic and Social Council [indicated](#) she is “planning to hold an ECOSOC meeting that would bring together experts and policy makers to help governments to effectively respond to the crisis, and get back on track to achieve the SDGs”.