



# ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

## Briefing on COVID-19

Remarks by the President of the Economic and Social Council

H. E. Ambassador Mona Juul

27 March 2020

President of the General Assembly,

President of the Security Council,

Secretary-General,

Excellencies,

Dear Colleagues,

The impact of COVID-19 strikes at the heart of what the UN stands for: our values, ideals and norms. It is a defining moment of our time.

We are witnessing an unprecedented global emergency. We must come together, in solidarity, to contain COVID-19, to save lives and to put countries back on track towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

At times of crisis, there is a tendency to turn inwards, and focus on our own countries, communities and homes. But as we have seen, this pandemic requires decisive and urgent collective action from the global community, and from each and every one of us.

I commend the strong leadership and commitment shown by the World Health Organisation, and the Secretary-General. Including their clear messages on the need for global solidarity at this time.

We are united in many ways. In our appreciation for the countless frontline healthcare workers, who are working to prevent further outbreaks and develop treatments, with their own safety on the line. And also in our grief for those we have

lost. I express my deepest condolences to the families, and countries, who have suffered the loss or illness of their loved ones.

Dear Colleagues,

Our utmost priority is to contain COVID-19. To save lives, and keep people healthy. But the impact of the virus is spreading far beyond our health—affecting social, economic and financial systems worldwide, affecting peoples’ lives and livelihoods.

Our development gains are at risk of being reversed in the very year when we launched a Decade of Action and Delivery to accelerate the implementation the Sustainable Development Goals.

While the impact of the pandemic is being felt universally, its consequences will be more severe for the most vulnerable countries, in particular the Least Developed Countries. Existing socio-economic inequalities are exacerbated by the pandemic. Those furthest behind will bear the greatest burden. We must tailor our responses.

The current crisis also affects women and men differently. Therefore, our crisis response must be gender-responsive and address gender inequalities.

Dear Colleagues,

The Economic and Social Council of the United Nations – ECOSOC - is committed to mobilising its system of: bodies, experts, and partners, to address the multifaceted impact this pandemic has on our countries, communities and people.

Critical work is already being undertaken by ECOSOC subsidiary organs and their experts around the world, partnering with governments and civil society. And I thank all UN staff, international and local, for the support you provide to those in need. As we speak, UN country offices, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinators, continue working closely with governments, agencies, partners and civil society to ensure the safety, security and health of the population.

For our part, here at UNHQ, we can use the upcoming ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment as an important opportunity to take stock of the rapidly changing situation on the ground.

The ECOSOC system, with its range of intergovernmental bodies, is adapting for business continuity at the United Nations without physical meetings. Our work does not stop.

Here in New York we must turn our attention to the tools we have, and to making them work better for the situation we face. For instance, the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development, the HLPF, which could have a pivotal role in monitoring, and assessing, the direct, and indirect, impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Regrettably, ECOSOC's ambitious programme this spring on financing for development, on science and technology, and on partnerships, has to be adjusted due to the COVID-19 response (and a revised meeting schedule will be shared shortly for approval.)

I assure you though, that we will not lose sight of the need for ECOSOC to respond politically, and through concrete action in these difficult times.

This pandemic has demonstrated that responses require a whole-of-society approach. One that brings national and local governments together with the private sector, the scientific community, civil society and our young people. This is exactly what ECOSOC, and particularly the HLPF, is all about. Together we will continue to engage the full range of actors, including the IMF and the World Bank.

Colleagues,

The need for humanitarian relief is urgent, and the UN has taken encouraging steps this week. I welcome the launch by the Secretary-General of the 2 billion USD global humanitarian response plan and encourage all to provide generous funding towards its fulfilment.

This effort is complimented by the CERF (Central Emergency Response Fund) which has now released a total of 75 million USD to support humanitarian action in response to COVID-19.

While these are promising steps, it is clear we will have to look further at how to continue to address those needs. Particularly as the planning for ECOSOC's Humanitarian Segment proceeds.

Beyond immediate humanitarian aid, developing countries will need support to lessen the overall socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis. In this, the UN must play a key role. We need joint UN efforts to assist developing countries in their recovery and in building more resilient health systems.

There can be no doubt that a comprehensive response will also require large financing packages from the multilateral development banks. Both in the form of immediate support, to keep economies and societies afloat, and longer term financing to re-ignite sustainable growth and I welcome yesterday's announcements by the G-20, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund on their economic support and other measures.

Dear Colleagues,

The response to COVID-19 must be multilateral to succeed.

Let us make full use of ECOSOC as an inclusive platform to engage and mobilize governments, local authorities, the UN system, international finance institutions, the scientific community, civil society and young people around the world.

In times like these, we need to keep a cool head and a warm heart, to find steadier ground on which to stand, to meet the challenges of the day.

Thank you.