



*Check against delivery*

**Statement by ECOSOC President Ambassador Mona Juul on impact of COVID19 on our upcoming meetings at the United Nations**

**10 March 2020**

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

With Corona Virus Disease 2019, or COVID-19, we are confronted with a unique crisis that has widespread human, social, and economic ramifications.

It is a test for our countries, and societies. And I offer my condolences to the families and countries who have already suffered the loss of their dear ones.

The growing scale of this issue underscores that primarily we need to address COVID-19 together.

We need to minimize its impacts, particularly as we embark in the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.

As development efforts are too often put on hold for crisis preparedness.

The Presidency and the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council takes this situation, both here at HQ and around the world very seriously.

I concur with the President of the General Assembly: the health and safety of delegates and staff of the United Nations is of the utmost importance.

And we must also protect the partners of the UN.

The UN Staff - local and international - perform essential duties all over the world.

We very much appreciate the work that they do, and the sacrifice of those who work under very difficult and complex circumstances.

The COVID-19 has made their work even more challenging, and I thank them for their dedication.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the World Health Organization, the Director-General, and his staff who are on the front lines of this epidemic.

The guidance from WHO has been crucial in keeping a balanced approach to the situation which is evolving from day to day.

It is particularly encouraging to see WHO, and all of the UN system, collaborating with social media platforms to counter misinformation.

We have learned from previous outbreaks the importance of: a strong, coordinated, and integrated, response from the international community. One led by the WHO and built on up to date and reliable information.

Colleagues,

Today, we will focus on the impact of COVID 19 on our upcoming meetings at the United Nations.

I would like to note that ECOSOC has a very heavy calendar of meetings in the spring. With expected participation from capitals, as well as from a wide variety of stakeholders.

For ECOSOC itself, these include various segments and foras of the Council, and other ad hoc meetings.

Some of them have been requested by the General Assembly.

Whereas others relate to the work of ECOSOC's subsidiary bodies, including: the Functional Commissions, Regional Commissions, and Expert Bodies.

If these meetings are to be adapted (scaled down, postponed or cancelled), this would require consultations with Member States.

As most of these are mandated by Member States, including the timing or number of days.

At this stage, changes to the Council's work programme would have implications for the entire workflow of the Council. As the various subsidiary bodies are expected to report to ECOSOC before the end of July 2020.

ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies hold a wide variety of meetings. Some involve, and are indeed based on, wide stakeholder participation, including that of civil society and the private sector.

In planning for possible adaptations to a meeting, it will be important to assess the substantive value of holding down-scaled meetings or other types of adaptations.

Some meetings also have the task of adopting intergovernmentally negotiated documents. This should be an important factor in our assessments.

Colleagues,

We need to ensure a holistic approach based on criteria which are easy to understand, including by the public.

The UN must have a coherent approach across bodies and mandates.

One based on accurate information, and assessment of risks. And decisions must be based on solidarity among Member States.

In this respect, I have written to the chairs of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies and requested them to consult with the Presidency on the proposed way forward to ensure we are taking a coordinated approach.

I will also convene an ECOSOC Bureau meeting later today to discuss how we proceed, taking into account our discussions here today.

The Bureau will then- as per usual practice through their respective regional groups- consult with Member States on the Bureau's proposals to move forward.

I reiterate also that this will all be done in close coordination with the President of the General Assembly and the Secretariat.

I am grateful to the Secretariat at all levels for the work already done on risk assessment, preparedness and business continuity, and I look forward to the briefing that we are about to hear.