



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

20 November 2020

Excellency,

Further to my letters dated 11 and 17 November, I have the honour to transmit herewith the concept note and provisional programme for the 31st Special Session of the General Assembly in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, to be held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 3-4 December 2020. An information note prepared by the Secretariat on logistical arrangements of the Special Session is also attached as Annex I and Annex II.

The first day of the Session on 3 December, consisting of an opening segment followed by a general debate, will focus on the experiences of Member States in addressing the impacts of the pandemic. I am confident that we will benefit from hearing from one another's practices and lessons learned.

The interactive dialogue on 4 December will entail a series of moderated panels covering key aspects of the impact of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic, including the UN system's health and humanitarian response to date; the road to a COVID-19 vaccine; and the socio-economic impact and recovering better. Details pertaining to Member State engagement with these panels will be communicated separately through the Chairs of the Regional Groups. I look forward to fruitful exchanges and how we can strengthen our collective response to the pandemic and work together to recover better.

Updates to the enclosed provisional programme and details pertaining to other aspects of the Special Session will be uploaded online under the events tab of my website (<https://www.un.org/pga>) on an ongoing basis. For further information, please contact Ms. Hila Wesa, Team Leader for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs (wesa@un.org), and Ms. Inga Kanchaveli, Senior Advisor for General Assembly Affairs (inga.kanchaveli@un.org).

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Volkan Bozkir'.

Volkan BOZKIR

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

**Special Session of the General Assembly
in response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic
3-4 December 2020
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

Concept Note

The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the COVID-19 Pandemic¹ will be held at the level of Heads of State and Government on 3-4 December 2020 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only the greatest global health crisis since the creation of the United Nations 75 years ago, it is also a humanitarian crisis, a socio-economic crisis, a security crisis, and a human rights crisis. It has claimed more than 1.3 million lives, infected more than 54 million people, and upended the livelihoods of even more all over the world. It could result in the worst global recession since the Great Depression. The pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities and exacerbated inequalities within and between developing and developed countries, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable people particularly hard. With entire continents experiencing a resurgence in cases, living with and managing the impact and consequences of COVID-19 is the new global reality that no one can escape.

The United Nations system-wide response to COVID-19² is based on three pillars: a large-scale, coordinated, comprehensive health response; a wide-ranging effort to safeguard lives and livelihoods; and a transformative recovery process.

Following the public health response, led by the World Health Organization, the United Nations launched a coordinated global humanitarian response plan to mitigate the immediate impacts of COVID-19 in some of the world's most vulnerable countries. The COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan is being implemented by UN agencies in partnership with vital local and international partners on the frontlines of the response.

Complementing the UN humanitarian efforts, to help countries recover better, the United Nations has also developed a global framework for the immediate socio-economic response to the pandemic. This is supported by the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund. To date, over 100 UN country teams are supporting government efforts through dedicated country-specific socio-economic response plans.

¹ Special session of the General Assembly in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, A/RES/75/4, as adopted on 5 November 2020.

² United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better: https://www.un.org/pga/75/wp-content/uploads/sites/100/2020/10/un_comprehensive_response_to_covid.pdf

Other efforts advanced in response to the pandemic include the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire; an initiative on Financing for Development in the era of COVID-19 and beyond; the launch of UN-Verified to mobilize "digital first responders" to counter misinformation online; and, the publication of Policy Briefs to help guide governments in fighting the pandemic.

The international community can turn this crisis around through collective, coordinated action in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. Through this framework countries can craft strategies to mitigate the effects of COVID-19, recover better, build forward and on track to achieving the objectives of the 2030 Agenda while ensuring no one is left behind.

The United Nations General Assembly Special Session on COVID-19 provides the opportunity for the international community to assess and hone its collective response to this pandemic. World leaders, United Nations principals, and other relevant stakeholders will be able to engage in dialogue on the impacts of the pandemic on people, societies and economies and discuss the multifaceted, coordinated response required to address this crisis. The two-day Special Session will allow many stakeholders to share their experiences in fighting the pandemic, reflect on the global response to date, and forge a united, coordinated, and people-centered path forward.

The first day of the Session on 3 December, consisting of an opening segment followed by a general debate, will focus on the experiences of Member States. The interactive dialogue on 4 December, will entail a series of moderated panels covering key aspects of the impact of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic, including the UN system's health and humanitarian response to date; the road to a COVID-19 vaccine; and the socio-economic impact and recovering better.

A provisional programme for the Special Session is enclosed. Additional details, including updates to the programme and other aspects of the Special Session, will be uploaded online under the events tab of <https://www.un.org/pga> on an ongoing basis.

Provisional Programme 3 December 2020

9:00 – 10:00 Opening Segment

Statements by:

- President of the General Assembly
- Secretary-General
- President of the Economic and Social Council
- President of the Security Council for the month of December 2020 (South Africa)
- Chair of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (Azerbaijan)

10:00 – 21:00 General Debate³

³In accordance with A/RES/75/4, statements during the general debate are to be delivered by Heads of State or Government, head of delegation or other dignitary of Member and Observer States, the European Union, and, time permitting, a limited number of representatives from relevant organizations attending the special session, in line with subparagraphs (d) and (e) of A/RES/75/4. Pre-recorded video statements will be played in the General Assembly Hall after introduction by the representative who is physically present in the Hall. The time limit for each statement is five minutes for individual delegations and seven minutes for each statement made on behalf of a group of States. Introductory remarks and length of the video itself shall be counted in the allocated time limit.

Provisional Programme 4 December 2020

9:00 – 21:00 Opening by the President of the General Assembly

Presentation by the Director-General of the World Health Organization

Interactive Dialogue⁴

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Panel I: The UN System Response to COVID-19

This discussion will take stock of the UN system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will examine comprehensive and coordinated responses of the UN system and partners, focusing on the most vulnerable people and those disproportionately impacted in different operational contexts, including those in low-resource settings, conflict situations, and displaced communities. The role of, and impact on, women and girls will be a focus, particularly women as front-line responders. The discussion will outline what has worked well, identify operational and policy gaps as well as lessons learned. It will highlight actions required for the continued immediate humanitarian and health response, protection of human rights, and the launch of urgent economic recovery and social protection measures.

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Panel II: The Road to a COVID-19 Vaccine – a Global Public Good

Significant progress has been made in developing new tools and strategies in the fight against COVID-19, including vaccines, as the result of unprecedented international collaboration, much-needed investments, and world-class scientific efforts in research and development. The world is at a critical acceleration point in the vaccine development and deployment timeline, poised to turn the corner into the vaccine era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of this dedicated discussion on a COVID-19 vaccine is to breakdown the process of vaccine development and address the 'infodemic' around it in publicly digestible terms. How many vaccines are currently being tested and at which stages in the process is each one? How will vaccines be produced and distributed? The How is the multilateral system working with governments and private sector partners to ensure the equitable distribution of, and access to, a COVID19 vaccine as a global public good? How are the financial resources required to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 tools, including a vaccine, being mobilized? What other testing and treatments need to be readily accessible, pending the universal access to vaccines?

⁴ The interactive dialogue is being organized in a hybrid format with in-person and virtual participation.

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Panel III: Resilience and Recovering Better from COVID-19

This discussion will examine the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and consider the path toward a resilient recovery, including the requisite preparedness for future threats. There will be a focus on in trade and finance, including inclusive stimulus and recovery packages, addressing debt crises ensuing from the pandemic, mobilizing investment that support sustainable solutions and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The discussion will highlight opportunities for accelerating the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through recovery plans and policies that favor inclusion, sustainability and resilience—such as expanding universal protection; promoting green jobs; making sustainable food systems; and increasing digital connectivity.

The Special Session will conclude with the Closing Segment.