



9 March 2021

Excellency,

Further to the successful conclusion of the Special Session of the General Assembly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was held on 3 and 4 December 2020, I have the honor to circulate herewith its summary, pursuant to operative paragraph 8 of General Assembly Resolution 75/4.

The summary reflects the discussions of the Special Session, including the interactive dialogue, which provided an opportunity to share the experiences of all Member States, take stock the UN inter-agency coordination efforts and expertise of relevant stakeholders to address the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts.

I once again take this opportunity to thank all Member States for proactive engagement in making this Special Session a success. The Special Session was another step forward in our joint efforts to fight and recover from COVID-19, building on the principles of solidarity and shared humanity. With your support, my office shall continue to galvanize collective efforts to address the challenges and consequences of the pandemic as well as mobilize access to vaccine for all.

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

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
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

3-4 December 2020

Summary of the President of the General Assembly¹

I. Introduction

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 75/4, the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic was held at the level of Heads of State and Government on 3-4 December 2020.

The first day of the Session on 3 December, consisted of an opening segment followed by a general debate focused on the experiences of Member States in addressing the impacts of the pandemic. The interactive dialogue on 4 December included three moderated panels covering key aspects of the impact of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic: (i) The UN System Response to COVID-19, (ii) The Road to a COVID-19 Vaccine – A Global Public Good, and (iii) Resilience and Recovering Better from COVID-19. The official program of the Special Session is enclosed as Appendix A. The Special Session made a strong call for multilateralism and a coordinated international response to the pandemic, particularly for supporting the poorest and most vulnerable countries and people. Member States called for urgent action to guarantee equitable access to and distribution of COVID-19 tools, especially life-saving vaccines, and an economic recovery that can put the world back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. There was a shared sense that, despite the formidable challenges, the international community can turn the COVID-19 crisis around, recover better, guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the protection of human rights and ensuring no one is left behind.

II. Opening Segment and General Debate | 03 December 2020

H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly opened the Special Session, delivering a statement on the importance of the session and the way forward. His remarks were followed by statements by H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council, and H.E. Mr. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, Chair of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM). These four statements are enclosed as Appendix B herewith.

A total of 147 Member States, 1 Observer, and 3 civil society organizations participated in the General Debate, including pre-recorded video messages from over 70 Heads of State and Government and

¹ The present summary is prepared in accordance with operating paragraph 8 of A/RES/75/4 which “requests the President of the General Assembly to prepare an informal factual summary to reflect information presented during the special session”.

48 Ministers.² Member States highlighted that COVID-19 had exposed and exacerbated existing challenges with many also acknowledging that the pandemic offers opportunities to introduce innovative solutions to address the disease and its impacts.

The following key messages emerged from the General Debate:

- Appreciation for holding the Special Session, including recognition of NAM's leadership in the initiative. Acknowledgement that it was an important moment to take stock of the impact of COVID-19, share experiences and put forth concrete actions for the way forward for recovering better;
- Increased International solidarity is needed to build back better, with the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as the roadmap. Examples of international cooperation that emerged during the crisis should emulate enhanced multilateral efforts post-pandemic;
- Humanitarian needs and health impacts continue to rise as a result of the pandemic. Acute food insecurity, risk of famine, and other vulnerabilities and risks are increasing;
- Countries have been implementing various policies, creating new mechanisms, strengthening the health response, providing socio-economic support, ensuring physical distancing and innovating to respond to the crisis and its impacts;
- Building resilient health systems and ensuring that everyone has access to essential health services are critical for sustainable development;
- Stimulus packages should include investment in the SDGs, including to prevent backsliding on targets, such as those relating to gender equality;
- Recognition of the leadership and work of the United Nations, including the WHO, with some Member States proposing strengthening of the WHO to ensure the multilateral system is better prepared for future health crises;
- The WHO's Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) and its COVAX facility are critical initiatives in the collective response to COVID-19.
- COVID-19 vaccines should be a global public good, readily available to and accessible by all to ensure that no one is left behind;
- Development assistance, financial support and easing of the debt burden are critical to control the economic and financial pressures ensuing from the pandemic in developing countries; and
- Actions to combat climate change, preserve the environment and live in harmony with nature should be pursued as an integral part of the recovery.

The immediate response to COVID-19

Member States described actions taken at various levels to stop the pandemic and address its impacts. The immediate highest priority should be saving lives and restoring livelihoods. Public health interventions have focused on detection, containment and preventative measures. Many stressed a science-based response, where countries have established national mechanisms, including national

² 147 Member States, 1 Observer (European Union), 3 civil society organizations participated in the General Debate. Of the Member States, 72 were at the level of Head of State or Government, 1 Vice-President, 6 Deputy Prime Ministers, 48 Ministers, 4 Vice-Ministers.

emergency response committees and government management systems based on science and innovation, to prevent and contain the pandemic. Additional measures have included capacity enhancement in the health care system and developing multisectoral contingency plans. Efforts have also focused on implementing universal health coverage at all levels of care. Some countries have introduced innovative measures, such as drive-through screening stations and residential treatment centers.

Countries have standardized treatment procedures for COVID-19. A majority of Member States underscored that life-saving services and products, including medical devices, medicines and vaccines must be made accessible to the most vulnerable countries and groups.

States have also implemented social protection systems and enacted targeted economic measures to provide relief to, and improve the livelihoods of, their citizens. Some reported that the design and implementation of stimulus packages were not sufficiently effective. Some also focused on community-based approaches, and others expressed that the pandemic had worsened humanitarian and human rights situations.

Many countries have also put in place border control restrictions on the movement of people as an effective way to control the spread of the virus. Such measures, however, have caused negative spillover effects, including for airlines and related industries (e.g. tourism) and hampered economic growth.

There was also a call for stepping up efforts to ensure unrestricted internal and cross-border movement of humanitarian workers and the free flow of health and humanitarian supplies.

The need for international cooperation and solidarity

Member States emphasized that COVID-19 has brought to the fore global interdependence and has reaffirmed the need for global solidarity and collective action. The global pandemic also revealed how vulnerable and exposed humanity is. The effects have dramatically affected human lives and re-shaped human behaviour. Such global challenges require global solidarity, global approaches and aligned and collective action.

Member States stressed the importance of multilateralism as an instrument to combat the pandemic. Global coordinated international efforts were considered essential to confront the pandemic, while taking into account the needs of all countries and people. Some stated that responses to the pandemic need to be mobilized on a larger scale, and financial support was considered a key aspect of solidarity. Countries acknowledged the great efforts by, and fundamental role of, the United Nations and expressed their support to the Secretary-General's vision for a New Global Deal and a New Social Contract. Some reiterated their support to his appeal for a global ceasefire and the removal of sanctions.

Member States joined in supporting the WHO, the ACT-Accelerator initiative, COVAX, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan and related humanitarian funds (especially the early deployment of the Central Emergency Relief Fund) and the UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust

Fund to support developing countries overcome the health and development crises caused by the pandemic. Some countries have joined COVAX to access vaccinations for up to 20 per cent of their populations. Others shared their contributions to the process, including through local trials for the vaccine.

The importance of equitable access to vaccines was underscored. Vaccines should be considered a global public good, and the most vulnerable countries must have fair and equitable access to vaccines and medical protection. This was essential for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and to leave no one behind. The G20's commitment to support a fair distribution of vaccines to developing countries was welcomed. Many stressed that vaccines should be accessible to developing countries at a reasonable price, and some suggested international assistance, led by WHO, for training in developing countries on vaccine procedures.

Countries expressed appreciation for the critical role of WHO during the pandemic and its wide-ranging support, guidelines and recommendations of effective measures. Several governments indicated that they have followed closely such guidelines and measures and found them to be instrumental in flattening the curve and limiting loss of lives and livelihoods. Some countries benefitted from the supply of PPE and other medical equipment provided by WHO and the UN system, and were profoundly grateful for such global cooperation efforts. Several called for more commitment and financial contribution to WHO and other related agencies, with several countries announcing their specific pledges to the WHO.

Many countries expressed appreciation to the UN system for a series of measures, including in leading global coordination work, convening timely and important meetings, supporting collective, integrated and concrete actions in fighting the pandemic and limiting its devastating impact. Global challenges required global action. It was clear that the global actors have stepped up to confront the pandemic, though they were not always aligned at the early stages. More collaboration, coherence and coordination is needed, drawing on the comparative strengths and mandates of various actors. Collective actions also need to be aligned between global actors, national governments and regional initiatives, as well as with action by stakeholder groups, including the private sector, civil society, and other non-government actors. It is critical that such collective actions be guided by international norms, principles and guidelines.

Praising the effective coordination efforts of WHO and the COVAX facility, countries looked forward to more effective collaborative approaches and cooperation spearheaded by the UN system, along other international and regional partners. It was said that, building upon efforts by the UN system, including WHO, a systemic and strategic response plan would be fundamental for building back better and realizing the principle of leaving no one behind.

Regional and sub-regional collaborative efforts must supplement global cooperation in strengthening partnership and solidarity. Regional organizations, such as the African Union and SADC were also acknowledged for their coordination efforts in responding to the pandemic. Examples of regional cooperation examples were noted, such as the High-Level Summit in Goma and the African Union's cross-border efforts to combat and respond to the pandemic. The pandemic can only be countered

effectively through global solidarity, intensified cooperation and cohesive actions at the national, regional and global levels.

Recovering better

Member States underscored the importance of a resilient recovery with a focus on preparedness and prevention measures that address underlying inequalities and vulnerabilities, especially of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations. They stressed the importance of building resilient health systems, noting that sustainable development and healthcare go hand in hand. There was a call for strengthening of national health systems, promoting universal and free access to basic medical services and guarantees towards equitable distribution of vital resources. A call was also made for the strengthening of exchanges of data, best practices and guidelines under the lead of WHO. A response similar to the one for HIV/AIDS is needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is need to increase investment into public health surveillance systems, emergency response mechanisms and in resilient health systems to be able to respond to future pandemics, and one country proposed putting in place a new global instrument to prevent future pandemics. The designation of 2021 as the international year of healthcare worker by WHO was also acknowledged. Also critical is to increase investment in the protection of healthcare workers, and in providing them with adequate PPE and supplies to discharge their functions, both effectively and safely.

Countries emphasized that the world should work together for an inclusive recovery, especially for the poor and marginalized. Priorities needed to include social protection, universal health coverage and respect for human rights. Comprehensive social security measures need to protect women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities, among others. The pandemic cannot be used as an excuse to undermine the progress made on gender equality, including efforts to fight violence against women, and on the protection of children. Some speakers announced their intention to take new measures to provide improved WASH facilities to vulnerable children. Others highlighted the need to engage more with youth stakeholders at the United Nations as well as in local and national monitoring processes. There is also a need to bridge social divides to build more just and inclusive societies, including through universal health care, global food security and quality education at all levels, and to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The need to combat growing xenophobia and racism was also underscored. There was also a call for the need to restore public confidence to ensure the sustainability of COVID-19 recovery actions.

Member States emphasized that the SDGs remain the only relevant and globally accepted roadmap for facing numerous challenges like growing inequality, economic uncertainty, preservation and protection of biodiversity, and climate change. They stated that the pandemic provided opportunities to implement innovative solutions in all areas, including to address inequalities and lack of social protection. It is also an opportunity to enhance the protection of the environment. The recent Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report highlighted the link between emerging diseases and the destruction of biodiversity, demonstrating the urgent need for strict national and international policies to protect the environment. Some

speakers noted the opportunity presented by the pandemic to rethink consumption patterns and introduce more sustainable options.

Countries also highlighted the need to combat climate change, enhance the ambition on emissions reductions and boost resilience to climate impacts as an integral part of the recovery from COVID-19. Climate change was threatening humanity at the planetary level. Many developing countries that are not mainly responsible for carbon emissions are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The Green Climate Fund was called upon to take action for mitigation and adaptation measures, such as in vulnerable middle-income countries.

Countries stressed that the global recovery from the pandemic and building back better will depend on the global response, working together through concerted efforts to achieve people-centred outcomes in all countries. It was stated that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires complying with international commitments on financing for development. Current financing needs are magnified by the need to confront the impacts of the pandemic and recovery.

Countries in special needs, including LDCs, SIDS, LLDCs, MICs and others, called for more international financial aid to help ensure social safety nets for poorer economies and vulnerable groups and for building healthcare facilities. Some countries called upon development partners to fulfill their commitment of 0.15 to 0.2% of ODA to LDCs with immediate effect. The LDCs reiterated their proposal of a global stimulus package for LDCs and special drawing rights for LDCs for access to finance. International solidarity has been particularly important for LLDCs, who are heavily reliant on their neighbors for trade. Some countries called for a comprehensive economic stimulus package for Africa. Others highlighted that middle-income countries are being left behind and need to be better integrated into response efforts.

SIDS called for development partners to support their recovery efforts by providing debt relief in line with the outcome of 2020 G20 Summit, enhancing flexibility in financing modalities and priority areas of focus, re-assessing grant and loan eligibility criteria and utilizing all available financial instruments. Responsible technologies must be leveraged to provide services and scale up the implementation of SDGs. There was also an appeal to the international financial institutions to promote financing and investment mechanisms in developing capacity for scientific research and innovation.

Some countries cited a need for a global financial system that is more responsive to the needs of developing countries. Calls were thus made for a revision to the global financial architecture, further debt restructuring and debt cancellation, easing of the debt burden and economic and financial pressures and elimination of remittance fees. International financial institutions were called upon to design and execute region- and country-specific strategies to build more resilient financial systems towards a sustainable recovery.

Countries welcomed the G20 debt relief efforts, including the temporary suspension of debt services of low-income countries. The LDCs reinforced their call for a full cancellation of all LDC debt owed to bilateral and multilateral creditors, including private commercial creditors. A number of African countries called for a suspension of interest payments of Africa's external and public debt.

Lessons learned in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are also applicable in other emergencies and other areas, such as equitable access to other medicines and medical equipment, building sustainable and resilient health systems, and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches in responding to emergencies. It is also essential to engage people, especially the vulnerable groups, in ensuring a secured, inclusive and resilience society for all, as well as reinventing and reimagining a future that we want and the United Nations that we need.

III. Interactive Dialogue | 4 December 2020

H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly, opened the second day of the Special Session on Friday providing reflections on the General Debate, particularly that the interventions by Member States at the highest political levels clearly illustrated the need for a comprehensive multilateral approach to combat COVID-19 – a disease that does not recognize borders. His opening statement was followed by statements by H.E. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization. All three statements are enclosed in Appendix C herewith.

The interactive dialogue comprised three moderated panels covering key aspects of the impact of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic: (i) The UN System Response to COVID-19, (ii) The Road to a COVID-19 Vaccine – A Global Public Good, and (iii) Resilience and Recovering Better from COVID-19.

Panel I: The UN System Response to COVID-19

Main messages:

- The UN system came together like never before in the face of the unprecedented challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations have leveraged their comparative advantages in a joint effort to serve Member States and people affected by the ramifications of this pandemic.
- The pandemic is not over. Recently developed vaccines are important and must be distributed in a fair and equitable manner. But they are only one tool in moving life back to normal - a process that will take sustained and intensive cross-sectoral efforts.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is far-reaching and enormous and will remain so throughout 2021, compounding the continuing challenges of conflict, climate change and inequality.
- The need for humanitarian support continues to rise as the impact of the pandemic drives more people into humanitarian need, acute food insecurity and risk of famine, and as vulnerability and risks rise, as reflected in the Global Humanitarian Overview released on 1 December.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the “compass” for a sustainable recovery from the socio-economic effects of the COVID crisis which have halted and even reversed progress towards the SDGs.

- Human rights must be built into the response and recovery, and the rights of women and children must be protected. Pre-existing inequalities, especially for women and girls, have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including gender-based violence and exclusion.
- Significant financial resources are urgently needed to respond to immediate needs and support long-term goals, including the health response, providing life-saving assistance, bolstering economies facing severe recessions and rising costs. Also important is to support local communities who have been essential frontline responders.
- The global community was not prepared for the scope and scale of this pandemic. It must come together and scale up its ambition and investments to respond to the pandemic, address the inequalities and vulnerabilities it has exposed and exacerbated and to realize the SDGs.

A panel of high-level speakers from the World Health Organization, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme, Save the Children International, and Kenya Red Cross Society (presenting IFRC and ICRC engaged in an interactive discussion and responded to questions from Member States.

Scale and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Panellists were unanimous in describing the scale of the COVID-19 pandemic as massive and unprecedented. As of December 2020, the number of people infected has reached 35 million globally. Vaccines are important but only one tool in ending the pandemic. Humanitarian leaders underscored that 2021 will see the greatest humanitarian need since the UN was formed. The scale of the humanitarian emergency was reflected in the Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO) for 2021 – 235 million people may not survive without humanitarian assistance, reflecting a 40% increase from 2020, the greatest single-year increase ever. The impending threat of famine was highlighted. This is affecting 270 million people globally. Averting famines will be a top humanitarian priority in 2021.

In addition to a health and humanitarian emergency, COVID-19 is also a development crisis. The socio-economic effects of the pandemic are immense and continue to severely disrupt lives and livelihoods as well as undermine economies and social systems. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals has been set back, with the human development index decreasing for the first time in decades. This is especially harmful given half the world's population with no social protection in place. Many countries are experiencing the effects of the pandemic and the impact of the climate change crisis in parallel.

UN system's response to the pandemic

Panellists characterized the degree of cooperation across the UN system in response to the pandemic as unprecedented. Many initiatives have been taken over the last several months, through the leadership of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Crisis Management Team (led by WHO) and Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) (led by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC)). The strong

engagement and support of heads of UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes (AFP) and their cooperation at the county level were also critical.

Beyond the UN system, the role of partners such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, NGOs, civil society, the scientific community and the private sector were vital. This was truly a “world” effort.

From the outset, WFP logistics capacities were vital to distributing personal protective equipment (PPE), essential supplies and support supply chains and transporting personnel when air travel was constrained. WHO outlined the collaborative way the UN had worked across the areas of health, humanitarian, and socio-economic responses, leveraging the comparative advantages of different partners.

Several praised the work of the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in mobilizing the response from the humanitarian system, comprising UN humanitarian organizations, NGOs, and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement. Panellists also underlined the importance of the Global Humanitarian Overview, Central Emergency Response Fund and Country-Based Pooled Funds in prioritizing and mobilizing funding for urgent needs. UNICEF was praised for mobilizing vaccinations and maintaining immunizations against other deadly diseases while working with private sector and NGOs across all areas.

Panellists agreed that close cooperation needed to extend to the local level and to involve local actors and communities. Several said that the Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) systems perform well in bringing partners together at the national level. They also noted the rapid development of more than 130 socio-economic response plans prepared in country with RCs with the support of DCO and UN agency partners. Overall, it was stressed that the response was “an all of world effort”. The “United” in United Nations is more important in 2020 than ever.

A strong theme throughout the panel was the concern about the immediate and long-term impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable people. Foremost among these groups were women and children, who had suffered amongst other things a sharp rise in gender-based violence (GBV). Several panellists underscored that child rights and women’s rights had regressed. They pointed to the ‘generational impact’ on children, due to lack of access to education, increased protection risks, increased child labour, increased child marriage, all of which had reversed some 25 years of progress, and exacerbated GBV. Some reminded that without addressing the needs of women, young girls, children, refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and people on the move, we could face over 1 billion people in extreme poverty by 2030. The digital divide is also of great concern.

Some noted that gender-focused programs tend to be poorly funded, and called on donors to step up their support. The Emergency Relief Coordinator also underlined the serious deterioration in the “behaviour of men towards women and girls” and the scourge of GBV. The High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that women are most affected because they work in the informal economy and

must care for children. The lack of quality disaggregated data meant women have not been sufficiently included in the national thinking on the response to COVID-19.

Refugees, IDPs and migrants were recognized as being often marginalized in the global response. The High Commissioner for Refugees appealed for these people to be included in social safety nets and economic relief packages being rolled out. Refugees and migrants are often in informal sector jobs and risk exclusion in most economic support mechanisms, as well as for vaccines.

Member States and panellists highlighted what the humanitarian community has been able to do this year so far. The Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 was released two weeks following WHO's declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic with later updates and raised US\$4 billion from generous donors. One focus of activities has been on information and awareness raising and supporting social protection with payments worth more than US\$2 billion for the most vulnerable people. Participants also highlighted the work of WHO, WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF, and IOM in health, water and sanitation, food, refugee support and other urgent services but reminded all that the scale of needs still outpaces the reach of the response.

Looking ahead

Looking to 2021, a human rights-based approach was essential to the response to COVID-19 and to building back better, especially in addressing underlying inequalities and gender equality and women's empowerment. WHO cautioned that vaccines will be one tool in helping the world to return to something like normal, but its delivery would be a major challenge and more transformational change is necessary. WHO also stressed that the world was not prepared for a crisis like this and had not sufficiently invested before the pandemic or since its onset. Going forward, it would be crucial to invest in preparedness to deal better with, or ideally prevent, the next large-scale disease outbreak.

For the Humanitarian response, the panel called for donors to support the US\$35 billion required under the Global Humanitarian Overview for 2021. Panellists reminded of the value of the Central Emergency Response Fund and Country-Based Pooled Funds, including their ability to respond quickly and to provide support where funding is most needed. They also noted the important work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

In addition, the Emergency Relief Coordinator called for Member States to give instructions to IFIs to release more financing to the poorest countries to protect the most vulnerable people; to fund programmes focussed on women and girls. Also important is to invest in and preserve NGOs, especially community-based NGOs, and civil society institutions in a tightening budget space. Several others emphasized that ongoing crises like climate change and widespread conflict were not going away. Some speakers echoed the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire and to respect International Humanitarian Law. Many called for investment in transforming to a green economies and climate action.

Panellists urged donors to provide the resources needed to combat the pandemic and its effects including through the Global Health Observatory and the Central Emergency Respond Fund. It is also

essential to fund the macro-economic response and provide the resources needed to keep millions from falling into greater need.

For the future, panellists stressed that it is important to continue the work the UN is doing now to support governments' responses and their efforts to support populations. This will include helping to ensure equitable access to vaccines.

WHO called for continued preventative behaviours by individuals as well as governmental support and strategies. Good information on the vaccine will be critical for all people in all countries. Future prevention must learn these lessons.

Finally, vaccinating hundreds of millions against COVID-19 will be an enormous challenge but rolling out the COVID-19 vaccine in developing countries could not come at the expense of routine immunization programmes and other forms of assistance.

Looking to the economic recovery, UNDP called the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs the "compass" that pointed the UN system from immediate need to economic recovery. Growing debt is an obstacle to recovery, noting that "borrowing is not a solution if it creates a situation where countries cannot service their debt". There was a call for more ambitious measures to address the debt crisis and more flexible rules from international financial institutions to allow middle-income countries to benefit from more loan facilities, as the current approach does not consider vulnerability. Some noted the need to continue to enhance humanitarian and development collaboration.

Many emphasized the need to "focus on the icebergs in front of us" while recognizing the need to work on solutions in a way that contributes towards longer term development as well. Panellists recognized that the UN had responded strongly to the pandemic across the health, humanitarian, human rights and socio-economic dimensions. However, the global community was not prepared and did not act with the ambition needed. More is needed to learn the lessons and make the necessary investments going forward. This will require unprecedented support and responses to support populations, especially the most vulnerable and those who are experiencing inequalities. This will need consistent, comprehensive strategies to continue to fight the virus.

Panellists and Member States also urged for more action, to draw from lessons learned, to prevent future pandemics and to reinforce the health, human rights, humanitarian and socio-economic capacities of the UN, partners and local communities.

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

Main messages:

- No one is safe until we are all safe. Collaboration in science, regulatory mechanism, procurement, and distribution are key to ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.
- Country-preparedness, health system strengthening, and investments are critical for maximizing vaccine roll out.

- The ACT-Accelerator has a long-term funding gap of approximately US \$30 billion. This amount does not begin to compare to the economic damage and human toll of the pandemic. The return on investment would be in the order of US\$ 150 billion to the top ten economies of the world.

A panel of high-level speakers from the World Health Organization, BioNTech, Oxford University, The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI), United Nations Children's Fund, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and the WHO Special Envoy for ACT-Accelerator engaged in an interactive discussion and responded to questions from Member States. This panel was convened in two parts.

Part I: The Science and Development of Vaccines

The science behind vaccines

The vaccine development process for COVID-19 has been significantly compressed (from 3-10 years to 10 months). This is as a result of unprecedented international collaboration, previous investments into vaccine platforms, and significant coordination transparency, and information sharing among scientists.

The goal of vaccination is always the same, to expose the body to antigens (tiny fragments of the disease-causing organism) of a pathogen in order to create an immune response. Vaccines have different platforms for how they deliver the antigens to the body. Previous investments in developing new vaccine platforms have helped expedite COVID-19 vaccines. A vaccine can only be developed using the genetic sequence of a virus. This means that scientists were able to begin development of COVID-19 vaccines as soon as the sequence was provided by Chinese scientists on 10 January 2020. The BioNTech vaccine uses a new vaccine platform (messenger RNA and DNA) while the Oxford vaccine is a traditional viral vector-based vaccine (adenovirus vector platform).

In comparison to other viruses like influenza, the SARS-CoV-2 virus which causes COVID-19 appears to be antigenically stable and as such, scientists do not expect that a new vaccine would be needed every season. Scientists will closely monitor the virus' mutations to ensure continuing efficacy of the vaccines.

Close coordination and transparency among scientists globally was a critical expeditor in the development of vaccines for COVID-19 as exemplified by the availability of "pre-print" research (e.g. access to the data before peer review). WHO's Research and Development Blueprint, which was launched in 2016 to decrease the time for development, assessment, and authorization of medical countermeasures for the world's most dangerous pathogens, has also facilitated close coordination between scientists through a COVID-19 research roadmap established in early February 2020.

There are now over 150 vaccine candidates, with over 50 in clinical trials, 15 of these in late stage human trials, and with efficacy results for four vaccines. WHO's Target Product Profile for COVID-19 vaccines requires a clear demonstration of efficacy at least 70%, with a minimum of 50%. The first

efficacy results have far exceeded this, including the vaccines developed by BioNTech and Oxford University.

Challenges remain in promoting efficient and consistent regulatory approvals of vaccines and advancing equitable distribution strategies.

Collaboration and equitable access

There is a need for continued collaboration in vaccine development, especially those using platforms that enable large scale manufacturing and address the needs of different population groups. For example, the adenovirus vector platform used in Oxford University's vaccine allows it to be manufactured in large amounts at a lower cost. In addition, its storage temperature can range from two to eight degrees Celsius making it easier to integrate into existing supply and distribution networks. These are important enablers for universal distribution. Having manufacturing partners for distribution is another key variable in maximizing coverage.

The COVAX Facility is the vaccines pillar of the ACT-Accelerator, it is led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI), and WHO. COVAX is a key enabler for expediting the search for effective vaccines and equitable distribution for all countries. It is supporting the building of manufacturing capabilities and buying supply in advance so that 2 billion doses of vaccines can be fairly distributed by the end of 2021. In addition to vaccines, there is a continued critical need for diagnostics and therapeutics.

The ACT-Accelerator is the best option the world has for ending the pandemic as quickly as possible. It still needs approximately US \$30 billion, which is equal to less than 1% of the stimulus package which countries are currently spending in response to the pandemic. The return on investment for this facility would be US \$150 billion to the top ten economies of the world.

Misinformation and the 'infodemic'

When it comes to vaccines and their production, there is hope and optimism, but there are also fears and conspiracy theories. There is also a need to ensure correct information is developed and disseminated at the same pace as vaccine development. One such mechanism is Oxford University's Vaccine Knowledge Project (VKP) which provides information about vaccines for people who have concerns and hesitations about vaccination. The role of regulators is also critical in reviewing and approving the use of vaccines in countries. National authorities and regulators need to be transparent and open about what criteria they are using to evaluate products and develop national guidance accordingly.

This is the first time that science was carried out 'live' on the front pages of newspapers. The pandemic has brought to the fore the concept of evidence-based clinical medicine. WHO has made extensive investments in communicating about the science and is working closely with social media platforms and technology companies to guide the public to credible sources of information.

Part II: Vaccines for All, Equitable Access

Multilateralism and collaboration – “No one is safe, until we are all safe”

WHO’s COVAX Facility is critical for equitable vaccine distribution and has created global momentum for countries and companies to move beyond acting solely in their own interests.

To date, 189 countries have joined COVAX. The goal of the COVAX Facility is to have 2 billion doses of vaccines available by the end of 2021, with 20% vaccine coverage for all participating countries. Participants will be able to make their own decisions about national distribution. COVAX has secured right of first refusal on 1-2 billion doses of vaccines as a deliberate design to address supply shortages for the poorest populations and is supporting vaccine procurement for 92 low and lower middle-income countries through its Advance Market Commitment (AMC) funding component. Cooperation from relevant private sector companies is needed to prevent vaccines from being bought up solely through bilateral agreements.

Manufacturing and scale up of vaccine production are other challenges ahead. The COVAX Facility has been highly effective in engaging a broad set of manufacturers. Regulatory harmonization is also important in this context.

Challenges and innovations for equitable distribution

- ***Misinformation and ideological obstacles***

All participants reiterated their commitment to tackling misinformation. The importance of community engagement was emphasized in this regard. Authoritative medical information needs to be available to answer questions of finance ministers, health ministers and the general public. The Vaccine Demand Observatory from Yale University and the Vaccination Demand Hub from GAVI and WHO provide valuable information from a social and behavioral science perspective. This is a useful resource for Members States.

- ***Technical preparedness***

Country readiness is critical for effective vaccine distribution. WHO and UNICEF are working with the World Bank to undertake country assessments for vaccine readiness. Within the first nineteen days of the program, which began on 15 November, 35 countries have prepared national readiness coordination plans. The World Bank and other international financing institutions are prepared to assist countries in financing their national distribution plans. Weak and fragile health systems face particular challenges and some countries do not have sufficient numbers of trained and equipped healthcare professionals.

- ***Financing***

The ACT-Accelerator has raised US \$5 billion thus far. It has a funding gap of US \$28.2 billion over the next 34 months. This amount is only a fraction of the economic damage and human toll of the pandemic. The AMC part of the Facility has reached its goal of raising US \$2 billion in 2020; another US \$5 billion is needed in 2021. Apart from funding for the procurement of vaccines, US \$150 million

has been approved by GAVI to jumpstart country readiness work including for cold chain equipment and for technical assistance. So far, a small number of countries have made large investments in the ACT-Accelerator, with a larger group making smaller commitments. There is no scenario in which everyone will be vaccinated in 2021 .

- ***Innovations***

CEPI emphasized the need to have a variety of vaccines to serve all segments of the population. Vaccines often have different efficacy in the young, the elderly, pregnant women and people with disabilities. It is also critical to have vaccines that can be delivered in a variety of environments such as urban, rural, and humanitarian settings. Most current vaccines will require two doses and this is challenging in many situations. Over the past 5 years, GAVI and UNICEF have renewed cold chains in many countries and will continue to make new plans to supplement the cold chains in countries if they are insufficient. Innovation must come in many ways.

Panel III: Resilience and Recovering Better from COVID-19

Main messages

- Achieving the SDGs in the Decade of Action provides a framework for an inclusive recovery from COVID-19 toward a more resilient world that can better withstand future shocks.
- Recovering better from the COVID-19 pandemic requires providing immediate relief for the poorest and most vulnerable populations and countries. This requires immediate measures in the social, economic and financial sectors as well as working towards ensuring universal health coverage and social protection.
- An ambitious common approach to debt restructuring and debt resolution is needed for the countries who are impacted the most by the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic effects.
- Recovering from COVID-19 and building resilience to future shocks requires pursuing transformative policies for protecting, restoring and sustainably using biodiversity; halting deforestation and the illegal wildlife trade; and transforming energy and food systems. Combatting climate change should be an integral part of the recovery from COVID-19.

A panel of high-level speakers from the WHO, the UN Population Fund, the World Bank, UN Women, the International Labor Organization, UN Development Coordination Office, and World Wildlife Fund International engaged in an interactive discussion and responded to questions from Member States.

The socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

All economic assessments point to severe setbacks to the development gains of the last few decades. In order to realize the SDGs, coordinated national and international efforts are needed to prevent further damage from the pandemic and support a recovery that builds the kind of world envisioned in the 2030 Agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed existing inequalities between and within countries and exacerbated institutional weaknesses. Health systems have proven to be less resilient than expected, including in the wealthier countries.

The economic recession triggered by the pandemic is having a deep impact on employment, social development and entire economic sectors. Low income workers and women are particularly affected.

Several speakers stressed that women and girls are disproportionately affected by the pandemic, especially in the service sector. One study identified 24- to 35-year olds as the groups at highest risk of being negatively affected by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic; particularly women entering the labor market and having families at the same time. Another study projects that there will be 435 million women and girls likely falling into poverty in 2021. The need to choose between work and children is creating inter-family conflict, and domestic violence has skyrocketed.

One speaker noted that politicization of sexual and reproductive health issues prevents the achievement of a more resilient caregiving system that could allow women to achieve their full potential, while also noting that in many places men are increasing their share of responsibility as childcare providers, which should be encouraged. There is also an issue of intergenerational solidarity. The current generation grapples with climate change, ageing parents, disruption of training and education, job loss or the lack of opportunity in the labor market for youth.

Partnership among various actors at country level, including local civil society organizations and NGOs, have helped to monitor and evaluate what is happening on the ground thanks mobile technology.

Immediate response, recovery measures, and path forward

Stimulus packages have been necessary to address the recession and its impacts. These initially included social assistance and social protection for the extreme poor. They also supported livelihoods and protected jobs including for women, youth, vulnerable groups and people living in poverty. However, in some cases, financial support has gone to sectors or parts of the population which did not need it the most.

It has become clearer where resources should go. Some of the resources from stimulus packages should be directed at investments in various SDG areas. It is important to invest in ensuring universal and effective health care and social protection systems. At the same time, countries need to create the infrastructure to deploy vaccines. Testing, containment and treatment systems have to be put in place and strengthened in advance of future crises.

Action to ensure maternal health and vaccinate children must not be undermined by the response to COVID-19. Stimulus packages must also target women and vulnerable groups, in order to address pre-existing underlying inequalities. We should also avoid 'putting the brake too early' on stimulus packages to avert the mistakes made following the 2008-2009 financial crisis.

Mobilizing financial resources for responding to the impact of COVID-19

Developing countries have limited fiscal space and must use funds effectively to minimize the damage of the pandemic. Debt relief and other support from the international community are essential.

International financial institutions are providing new financing to countries to respond to the crisis and recover. Yet debt levels were rising even before the pandemic, and heavily indebted countries need even more fiscal space. In Africa, the debt crisis cannot be solved without debt reduction and resolution involving original creditors with transparency and innovative approaches on both debtor and creditor sides.

The panel discussed the debt suspension initiative of US\$ 4.7 billion in relief to 47 countries for six months, which was launched by the IMF and World Bank with G20 support. Speakers called upon creditors to support its extension beyond the initial six months. The G20 is currently considering a common approach principle to be urgently implemented. It is important to get the private sector to engage in such initiatives.

Accelerating the implementation of the SDGs

There was broad agreement that, within the COVID-19 crisis, there is an opportunity to learn from our setbacks and the shortcomings of our systems. Implementing the SDGs in the Decade of Action is widely considered to be an integral part of and a guide to the global recovery from COVID-19.

This requires improving health infrastructure, public health institutions and ensuring universal health coverage and social protection for all. Education must be considered a public good. It must serve the poorest and most vulnerable and must be as modern and resilient as possible.

Recovery measures must also ensure that the world becomes safer and can manage future risks, as it is certain that tomorrow will bring additional hazards and challenges. We must learn to protect better the development gains of the past. The panel noted that resilience means managing tomorrow's crises before they happen.

Many speakers highlighted multilateralism and international solidarity as key to a resilient recovery that addresses the needs of all people, especially the most vulnerable populations and countries.

Political will is necessary to continuously monitor the impacts of policy interventions. It is also important to give a voice to people in designing the response to COVID-19. Women need to have a greater role in decision-making in the health and financial sector in particular, so that women's needs are prioritized, and policies are gender-responsive and inclusive.

Speakers also discussed the creation of data platforms to support digitization and localization in decision making for recovery. Technology is critical in responding to the pandemic, especially for women. Microfinance can work through simple mobile payments. The digital divide between people -and between men and women- must be bridged.

Protecting nature and the climate

Zoonotic diseases are an indicator of an ecological imbalance, and with the increasing loss of forests, the risks of new diseases and pandemics will emerge. Many speakers supported the adoption of the One Health approach to recovery that recognizes the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. Measures to build resilience were discussed in the areas of protecting, restoring and sustainably using biodiversity; halting deforestation and the illegal wildlife trade; and transforming energy and food systems to make them more sustainable.

Several speakers supported increases in agricultural productivity through small-scale and sustainable “natural” farming, noting that farmers drive the global labor force.

An integrated response is needed because of the multidimensional nature of the COVID-19 and climate crises, which leads to a multiplier effect from investments.

To keep the focus on climate and nature as part of the recovery, political will is needed along with a sense of urgency and the recognition that it will take a long time to recover from COVID-19 and build resilience.

Support provided by the UN system

The UN system has come together to support the immediate health and humanitarian response to COVID-19 as well as the recovery from pandemic and its socio-economic impacts. It is committed to pursuing universal health coverage. It is currently working with countries to develop Socio-Economic response plans and helps countries to develop national response plans. It addresses the various impacts of the pandemic and supports an SDG-led recovery in a systemic way.

The UN is also regarded as the “convener of conveners”, gathering and working with multiple actors. Multilateralism and international solidarity are key for recovering better from the pandemic.

Investment in the needs of vulnerable populations is crucial. The UN system supports approaches that place the needs of women and girls at the center of all recovery efforts, to ensure that they can resume their pre-pandemic activities and return to work and school, and to enable them to reach their potential as drivers of a more sustainable future.

Many UN entities are collecting large amounts of data for different purposes, in an effort to monitor the crisis, its impacts and responses. They remain flexible in developing better systems. A data vulnerability dashboard has been launched by one UN entity to provide relevant data points for practitioners and decision makers at local levels.

The panel urged development partners, governments, and relevant stakeholders to invest in people, not diseases, and to place a focus on prevention over treatment. More must be done to invest in public health institutions and prevention.

VII. Closing Segment

H.E. Mr. Jerry Matthews Matjila, President of the Security Council for December 2020, made a statement during the closing of the Special Session. He emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic is a

global crisis of health, lives and livelihood that is shaking the foundations of the social, economic and political system, with significant consequences for global peace and security. The peacebuilding and development gains by countries in transition and post-conflict counties could be reversed. He also expressed concern that the pandemic has a disproportionate impact on women and girls, children, refugees, internally displaced persons, older persons, and persons with disabilities. Yet recovery from the pandemic also provides opportunity. He called for solidarity and implementation of Security Council resolution 2532 expressing support for the Secretary-General’s appeal for a global ceasefire and for an emphasis on countries in need, in situations of armed conflict or affected by humanitarian crises.

H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly, concluded the Special Session, noting that the high level of representation at the General Debate of the special session illustrated the commitment of all Member States to ending this pandemic. Reflecting on the interactive dialogue, he added that it also served to remind us that there are a wide range of stakeholders working tirelessly to end the COVID-19 pandemic, including the pioneers in the field of medical research, global health experts, and advocates from civil society. The discussions represented a microcosm of the global efforts to end the pandemic, safeguard humanity, and recover better. In particular, the discussion on vaccines offers us hope. Throughout the 75th session, we will continue to work towards achieving “vaccines for all” while leaving no one behind. He stressed that solidarity was our first and best line of defense to together combat this existential threat to humanity.

APPENDIX A

Final Program of Special Session of the General Assembly in response to the
Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic

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

**Program
3 December 2020**

9:00 – 10:00 Opening Segment

Statements by:

- **H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir**, President of the General Assembly
- **H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres**, Secretary-General of the United Nations
- **H.E. Mr. Munir Akram**, President of the Economic and Social Council
- **H.E. Mr. Jerry Matthews Matjila**, President of the Security Council for the month of December 2020
- **H.E. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev**, Chair of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries

10:00 – 21:00 General Debate³

³ In 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.

Program

4 December 2020

- 9:00 – 9:10 Opening by the President of the General Assembly
- 9:15 – 9:20 Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General
- 9:25 – 9:40 Presentation by the Director-General of the World Health Organization
- 9:45 – 18:00 Interactive Dialogue⁴**
- 9:45 – 12:15 Panel I: The UN System Response to COVID-19**
- Moderator: [Melissa Fleming](#), Under Secretary General for Global Communication – *in person*
 - Panelists:
 - [Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus](#), Director General of the World Health Organization / [Dr. Michael Ryan](#), Executive Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme – *virtual*
 - [Mr. Mark Lowcock](#), Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator – *in person*
 - [Ms. Michelle Bachelet Jeria](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights – *virtual*
 - [Mr. Achim Steiner](#), Administrator of the United Nations Development Program – *in-person*
 - [Mr. Filippo Grandi](#), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - *virtual*
 - [Mr. David Muldrow Beasley](#), Executive Director, World Food Program – *virtual*
 - [Ms. Inger Ashing](#), Chief Executive Officer Save the Children International – *virtual*
 - [Dr. Asha Mohammed](#), Secretary-General of the Kenyan Red Cross Society (representing IFRC and ICRC) – *virtual*
 - Member States registered to ask a question: Barbados (on behalf of CARICOM), Ecuador, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey, United States

This discussion will take stock of the UN system's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It will examine comprehensive and coordinated responses of UN entities and partners, focusing on the most vulnerable people and those disproportionately impacted in different operational

⁴ The interactive dialogue is being organized in a hybrid format, with in-person participation, live-virtual engagement, and pre-recorded content.

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.

12:45 – 15:15 Panel II: The Road to a COVID-19 Vaccine – a Global Public Good

- Moderator: [Lyse Doucet](#), BBC Presenter and Chief International Correspondent – *virtual*
- Panelists – Part I: The Science (12:45 – 14:00)
 - [Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus](#), Director-General of the World Health Organization / [Dr. Soumya Swaminathan](#), WHO Executive Director and Chief Scientist – *virtual*
 - [Prof. Uğur Şahin](#), Chief Executive Officer, BioNTech – *virtual*
 - [Dr. Özlem Türeci](#), Chief Medical Officer, BioNTech – *virtual*
 - [Prof. Sarah Gilbert](#), Oxford University – *virtual*
- Panelists – Part II: Vaccines for All (14:00 – 15:15)
 - [Dr. Seth Berkley](#), Chief Executive Officer, GAVI – *virtual*
 - [Ms. Henrietta H. Fore](#), Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund – *virtual*
 - [Dr. Richard Hatchett](#), Chief Executive Officer, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) – *virtual*
 - [Sir Andrew Witty](#), WHO Special Envoy for ACT-Accelerator – *virtual*
- Member States registered to ask a question: Algeria, Barbados (on behalf of CARICOM), Cameroon, Dominican Republic, Singapore, Sweden (on behalf of a group of Member States), United Kingdom

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? How is the multilateral system working with

governments and private sector partners to ensure the equitable distribution of, and access to, a COVID-19 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?

15:45 – 18:00 Panel III: Resilience and Recovering Better from COVID-19

- Moderator: [Femi Oke](#), International Journalist – *virtual*
- Panelists:
 - [Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus](#), Director General, World Health Organization / [Dr. Zsuzsanna Jakab](#), Deputy Director General, World Health Organization – *virtual*
 - [Dr. Natalia Kanem](#), Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund – *virtual*
 - [Ms. Mari Pangestu](#), Managing Director, Development Policy and Partnerships, World Bank – *virtual*
 - [Ms. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka](#), Executive Director, UN Women – *virtual*
 - [Mr. Guy Ryder](#), Director-General, International Labor Organization – *virtual*
 - [Mr. Robert Piper](#), Assistant Secretary-General, UN Development Coordination – *virtual*
 - [Mr. Pavan Sukhdev](#), President, WWF International / UNEP Goodwill Ambassador – *virtual*
- Member States/Observers registered to ask a question: Barbados (on behalf of CARICOM), Canada (on behalf of a group of Member States), China, European Union (on behalf of a group of Member States), Russia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania

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.

APPENDIX B

- Opening Statement by H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly
- Statement by H.E. Mr. Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations
- Statement by H.E. Mr. Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council
- Statement by H.E. Ilham Heydar oglu Aliyev, Chair of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries



31st United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic

- As delivered -

Statement by H.E. Volkan Bozkir, President of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

3 December 2020

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to welcome you, to the 31st United Nations General Assembly special session on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) – the first-ever special session to address a pandemic.

Today marks an overdue and much needed moment of reckoning. None of us could have imagined, this time last year, what was to come.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted life for everyone around the world. It has challenged our world in ways unlike any other crisis in the 75- year history of the United Nations.

COVID-19 is first and foremost a global health crisis. But it is at the same time an economic crisis, a development crisis, a humanitarian crisis, and a human rights crisis.

We face the deepest global recession since the Great Depression and the broadest collapse in incomes since 1870. The world economy has shrunk by 4.4 %. Global

extreme poverty is expected to rise for the first time in over 20 years. Up to 115 million people are at risk of being pushed into extreme poverty.

Foreign investments have been evaporating. Trade and travel restrictions; steep declines in export earnings, tourism and remittances, all put at risk the livelihoods of billions all around the world.

Our global development trajectory has been hijacked. Each country is feeling the pressure, yet, those that were already lagging behind, took the worst hit. Ongoing humanitarian crises have worsened, as a famine of unprecedented proportion threatens the poorest people in the world.

We are faced with a grave risk where half of the Decade of Action to Implement the SDGs will have been spent simply getting back to where we were at the beginning of the year.

Excellencies,

This pandemic has disproportionately affected the most vulnerable members of our societies – women, children, the elderly, the disabled, refugees, migrants, those living in slums and the homeless. It revealed the structural inequalities and obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights.

Lockdown measures have led to increased gender-based violence and domestic abuse of women. Many women will not be returning to the workforce, as they disproportionately shoulder the burden of unpaid care and home schooling.

Young people feel frustrated, as their education, community engagement and employment opportunities are restrained.

Pandemic-related disruptions in health and nutrition services could result in increased rates of child deaths from preventable causes.

Digital divide between developing and developed countries as well as between urban and rural settings is exacerbating exclusion and inequality. In communities around the world where internet connectivity is scarce, millions of children have no access to remote learning.

Already far from their homes due to conflicts, disasters, and persecution, refugees and internally displaced persons are suffering further due to the pandemic. And increases in racist discourse, hatred, stigmatization, stereotyping and misinformation have been accompanying the pandemic.

Excellencies,

This Hall is, where nations come together, where they unite. This august body, the General Assembly, is the voice, will, and conscience of humanity.

The world is looking to the UN for leadership, to step up and take demonstrable action to address the greatest challenge our world is facing today.

This crisis compels us to shake up how things are done, to be bold, and to restore confidence and trust in the United Nations.

No other institution is as far-reaching, as mandated or as normatively better placed. The United Nations must lead on this.

This General Assembly special session, is a historic moment for Member States, the United Nations, the scientific community, and other stakeholders, including the civil society, to hear from each other, engage in dialogue on the multifaceted consequences of the pandemic as well as on the ways to recover better and stronger.

This is not a time to point fingers. We have convened here to forge a path forward and to end the suffering of the people we serve.

Since the beginning, I have been convinced that holding this special session was a test for multilateralism, defined by our collective action on the most critical issue of our time. And it is in no way the end of our joint response and recovery from the pandemic.

We were not prepared for COVID-19, but we have to be prepared for the next pandemic, climate catastrophe or global recession. Because a crisis of this magnitude will come, and we will have to meet it when it does.

Distinguished Delegates,

We must be able to rise to the challenge, and our response should not simply target a return to the status quo ante.

What we need to do is clear:

First, we must start with ensuring fair and equitable access to vaccines.

Providing everyone with access to COVID-19 vaccines is both the right thing to do and the smart thing to do. From a moral standpoint, we have an obligation to leave no one behind and to protect the most vulnerable. From a practical standpoint, the value of any vaccine is entirely dependent on how many people can get it.

So we must strengthen political and resource mobilisation for multilateral initiatives that aim towards fair and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccine.

Secondly, we must work together to protect the most vulnerable countries that are lagging behind, most notably LDCs, LLDCs, and SIDS.

We must ensure that adequate financial resources are available to achieve an inclusive and resilient recovery. We need to join forces to address the challenges of debt vulnerability and diminished fiscal space.

I encourage International Financial Institutions and partner countries to do what they can to ease debt burdens, facilitate investment, and leverage development assistance during this crucial period. If necessary, we must pool financial resources to create investment funds.

The pandemic has also highlighted that we need more investment in social and health services all around the world. We need to develop projects for social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups. We must ensure universal health coverage.

While tackling the immediate consequences of the pandemic, we must also work towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), uphold our pledge to leave no one behind and ensure that our recovery efforts spur on the SDGs.

We do not need to prioritize among these goals. Indeed, the underlying urgency of ending extreme poverty, halting climate change, protecting the oceans, or building inclusive societies is more pressing than ever.

Investments towards the SDGs can serve as both a means and an end towards a post-COVID recovery.

The environmental root causes must also be addressed. COVID-19 is a zoonotic infectious disease, originating from animal populations being placed under severe environmental pressure. This is our last warning. We must get to the bottom of how this happened to ensure it doesn't happen again. We simply have to protect biodiversity and look towards a green recovery.

Finally, we must ensure that the policies we implement to combat the pandemic do not undermine the democratic institutions that underpin the long-term health of our economies and societies.

Our response to this crisis must be shaped by, and uphold respect for, human rights. Our policies should be universal, open, transparent, accountable, and inclusive. Promoting good governance, respecting the rule of law and allocating resources for the most vulnerable people will in fact support our response to the pandemic by making our societies more equitable and resilient.

Excellencies,

As a global community, we are at the beginning of the largest socio-economic recovery since the creation of the United Nations. If properly planned and coordinated, our recovery has the potential to jumpstart the SDGs, accelerate action on resilient infrastructure, improve access to education and healthcare, and better protect the natural world around us.

In 1945 skeptics thought the idea of a multilateral system, with an organization of unparalleled legitimacy at its core, to be impossible. But even at that time of unimaginable tragedy, the world came together – for the sake of humanity. I am sure, we will be able to do that once again.

Right now, we are all dreaming of the day this pandemic is over. The day we can take a deep breath of fresh air without fear. The day we can shake the hands of our colleagues, embrace our families, and laugh with our friends.

After months of adjusting to life during this pandemic, it would be easy to feel frustrated. But do not be deterred.

We are working for you.

We are working for the refugees, who are taking every precaution to protect their families in camp settings.

Working for the people with underlying conditions who are self-isolating at home.

For the girls and boys who wish, above all else, to return to school.

For the people in line waiting for COVID testing – and for those who do not have access to such diagnostics.

For the healthcare workers, who continue to work tirelessly on the frontline.

For the people battling the effects of the COVID-19 disease.

And for the families around the world, who are grieving the loss of their loved ones.

The UN is working for you.

We are united, for you.

Stay strong. There are brighter days ahead.

I thank you.

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

--

**REMARKS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY SPECIAL
SESSION IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC****New York, 3 December 2020**

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address this General Assembly Special Session in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nearly a year into the pandemic, we face a human tragedy, and a public health, humanitarian and development emergency.

For the first time since 1945, the entire world is confronted by a common threat, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or faith.

But while COVID-19 does not discriminate, our efforts to prevent and contain it do.

For that reason, the pandemic has hit the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies hardest.

It is having a devastating impact on older people; on women and girls; on low-income communities; on the marginalized and isolated. It is presenting new threats to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

From the start, the World Health Organization provided factual information and scientific guidance that should have been the basis for a coordinated global response.

Unfortunately, these recommendations were not followed. Some countries continue to reject facts and ignore guidance. And when countries go in their own direction, the virus goes in every direction.

The social and economic impact of the pandemic is enormous, and growing.

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of scientists and researchers from around the world, including those who are with us today, vaccines may become available within the next weeks and months.

But let's not fool ourselves.

A vaccine cannot undo damage that will stretch across years, even decades to come.

Extreme poverty is rising; the threat of famine looms.

We face the biggest global recession in eight decades.

These inter-generational impacts are not due to COVID-19 alone.

They are the result of long-term fragilities, inequalities and injustices that have been exposed by the pandemic.

It is time to reset.

As we build a strong recovery, we must seize the opportunity for change.

Excellencies,

Since March, the United Nations system has focused its efforts on helping countries avoid the worst impacts of the pandemic, while working for a strong recovery.

We have mobilized our procurement and logistics operations to deliver medical equipment and supplies to 172 countries.

A large-scale coordinated and comprehensive health response, guided by the World Health Organization, aims to suppress transmission of the virus, reduce mortality, and develop vaccines, diagnostics and treatments that are available to all.

I have repeatedly called for a COVID-19 vaccine to be a global public good available to everyone, everywhere. The ACT Accelerator and its COVAX facility are the tools to get us there.

There is still a finance gap of \$28 billion, including \$4.3 billion urgently needed for the next two months. I thank those who have contributed and urge all to show your strong support.

Beyond health, I appealed in March for a global ceasefire so that countries can focus on fighting the virus.

I echoed this call in my speech to the General Assembly in September, and urged new efforts and commitments to silence the guns by the end of the year.

I am encouraged by the support this call has received from Members States, regional organizations, armed movements and civil society organizations.

I am also encouraged by the response to my call for peace in homes around the world and an end to violence against women and girls. As we mark the 16 Days of Action against Gender-based Violence, I urge governments to take concrete steps to make good on your commitments.

The United Nations is also strongly engaged in combatting misinformation online. Our ‘Verified’ campaign provides compelling, trusted information, while offering people tools to identify false content.

Excellencies,

The United Nations system is mobilized in support of countries to address the devastating socio-economic, humanitarian and human rights aspects of this crisis.

We have extended life-saving assistance to 63 of the most vulnerable countries through our Global Humanitarian Response Plan.

From the start, we have called for a stimulus package worth at least 10 per cent of global GDP, and for debt relief for all countries that need it.

I welcome the steps that have been taken to help developing countries.

But they are totally insufficient for the scale of this crisis.

Many low- and middle-income developing countries need immediate support to avert a liquidity crisis. They are being forced to choose between providing basic services for their people, and servicing their debts.

The initiative we launched with the governments of Canada and Jamaica has developed policy options for financing the response to COVID-19 and putting us back on course to achieve the SDGs.

These include increasing the resources available to the International Monetary Fund, through a new allocation of Special Drawing Rights to the benefit of developing countries, and a voluntary reallocation of unused Special Drawing Rights.

I hope the G20 debt initiatives will be broadened so that all vulnerable developing countries are eligible, including middle-income countries that need debt relief.

In the longer-term, we need a reformed global architecture to enhance debt transparency and sustainability.

I am pressing for these policies in all my global engagements, most recently at the G20.

On the ground, our reformed United Nations Country teams led by a new generation of Resident Coordinators are supporting governments in developing national response and recovery plans.

Excellencies,

Looking ahead, the recovery from COVID-19 must address the pre-existing conditions it has exposed and exploited, from gaps in basic services to an overheated planet.

Stronger health systems and Universal Health Coverage must be a priority.

Since 2007, the World Health Organization has declared six Public Health Emergencies of International Concern.

COVID-19 will not be the last.

We must apply the lessons learned if we are to meet our responsibilities to our children and grandchildren.

Social safety nets must work for everyone. Too often, they fail precisely when they are needed most.

A new social contract between people, governments, the private sector, civil society and more, can tackle the roots of inequality with fair taxation on income and wealth, universal benefits, and opportunities for all.

As we relaunch economies, new investments must lay the groundwork for sustainable development and carbon neutrality, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

We cannot bequeath a broken planet and huge debts to future generations. The money we spend on recovery must go into building a greener, fairer future.

There is hopeful news on the climate front. A global coalition is taking shape for net zero emissions.

By early next year, countries representing more than 65 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions are likely to have committed to carbon neutrality.

This sends a clear signal to markets, investors and decision-makers: Act now to put a price on carbon; end fossil fuel subsidies; stop constructing new coal power plants; and invest in resilient infrastructure.

2021 must be a leap year – the year of a quantum leap towards net zero emissions of greenhouse gasses.

Every country should enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions well in advance of COP26 next November, and in line with the long-term goal of global carbon neutrality by 2050.

Adaptation is an essential component of climate action. For Least Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States, it is an existential issue.

I appeal to developed countries to fulfil their long-standing promise to provide \$100 billion annually to support developing countries in reaching our shared climate goals.

Early warning systems, climate-resilient infrastructure and agriculture can help avoid future losses while generating gains for biodiversity and other benefits.

We cannot separate climate action from global wellbeing, particularly biodiversity.

It is time to end the suicidal war with our planet.

2021 must be a year to address our planetary emergency.

We need a post-2020 biodiversity framework to halt the extinction crisis.

And we must see urgent action to protect and advance the health of the world's seas and oceans.

Overfishing must stop; chemical and solid waste pollution, particularly plastics, must be drastically reduced.

We must make peace with our planet if we are to live in balance with its incredible riches.

Excellencies,

As this difficult year draws to a close, let's resolve to take the tough, ambitious decisions and actions that will lead to better days ahead.

In a global crisis, we must meet the expectations of those we serve with unity, solidarity and coordinated global action.

I call on you to take the opportunity of this Special Session of the General Assembly to confront the COVID-19 pandemic with the urgency it demands; to save lives; and to build a better future together.

Thank you.



ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

Statement by Ambassador Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN and President of the Economic and Social Council during Special Session of the General Assembly in response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Pandemic

New York, December 3, 2020

I am honoured to be able to speak to the General Assembly's Special Session in response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

The crisis triggered by the COVID-19 is a health crisis, an economic crisis and above all a humanitarian crisis.

Global infections have reached 65 million. One and a half million people have died. We have lost one of our own, Ambassador Toure, the Charge d' Affaires of Guinea. I would like to take this opportunity to express, my deepest condolences to his family and the Government of Guinea.

The economic statistics are equally devastating.

- A global economic contraction of nearly 5%;
- over 60 developing countries need urgent financial help;
- Five countries have defaulted on debt payments;

- Twenty countries face acute food insecurity and scarcity;
- Over 300 million jobs lost;
- A 100 million people pushed back into extreme poverty;

Confronted by this monumental crisis, the world's response must be equally bold.

We must first ensure that a vaccine against the virus becomes available to everyone, everywhere, rich or poor, man or woman, on an equitable basis. Those who are the most at risk – health workers, the ill and infirm – women and children must receive priority.

Advance Purchase Agreements (APAs) for the virus must not be allowed to undermine our collective commitment to equity in vaccine distribution. A collective global commitment to the COVAX and C-TAP facility is indispensable.

Governments must also commit to transparency in all matters related to the production, distribution and fair pricing of the vaccine.

Second, each government should be encouraged to respond to the peoples' needs. As the Managing Director of the IMF has advised, countries should spend as much as needed to keep their people alive and their economies afloat.

It is evident that the developing countries do not have the fiscal space to finance a recovery from the pandemic.

Later in this session, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan, will propose an emergency plan for financial support to the developing countries.

If there is an economic collapse or a humanitarian disaster in the developing countries, it will halt a global economic recovery and the achievement of the SDGs will turn into a chimera.

In deploying resources, governments and international institutions must put people first. No one should be left behind.

To lift millions out of poverty and build resilience in our societies, investments in sustainable infrastructure will be vital. Science and technology must be deployed in “building back better”.

Research and development objectives, the International patent regime and the digitalization of economies should be aligned with the SDGs and climate objectives.

I am confident that this Special Session will contribute significantly to the achievement of these important objectives.

I am also confident that ECOSOC, through its forthcoming Forum on Financing for Development next April, the Forum on Science and Technology and Innovation in May, and the High-Level Political Forum in July, will complement and advance the deliberations and outcomes of this Special Session to build resilience structures that can recover from the COVID crisis, achieve the SDGs and prevent a climate catastrophe.

This is a time for the expression of International solidarity. This is a time for us to turn our nice words into concrete and specific actions.



**CHAIR OF
THE COORDINATING BUREAU
OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT**



**Statement by H.E. Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement**

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

Mr. President,

Distinguished Heads of State and Government,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of 120 Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As we mark the 75th anniversary of the United Nations which remains the central multilateral forum for addressing pressing global issues and challenges, we note with regret the emergence of many new areas of concern. These concerns necessitate the renewal of our collective commitment to the values of multilateralism and international cooperation, which underpin the Charter of the United Nations and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

A good testament to this was overwhelming support by the UN Member States for the initiative to convene the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic put forward by the Non-Aligned Movement. It constitutes, among others, the remarkable success for the Member States of NAM since this year also marks the 65th anniversary of the adoption of Bandung Declaration which envisaged the promotion of international cooperation for the common prosperity and well-being of all. In this connection, I would like to express on behalf of the Movement our sincere gratitude for the support extended by the UN Member States and the President of the General Assembly.

Throughout 2020 the global community has faced the greatest health crisis in recent history, with almost 60 million reported cases and more than 1 million deaths worldwide as of today, resulting in multifaceted repercussions in health, social, economic and financial spheres, causing



CHAIR OF THE COORDINATING BUREAU OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT



disruption to societies and economies, as well as to global commerce and travel, and making a devastating impact on the livelihood of people.

With the aim to contributing to the global efforts in addressing the unprecedented universal impact of the pandemic and to find out possible ways to provide a prompt, adequate and inclusive assistance to the Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement, Azerbaijan, as the Chair of the Movement convened the online Summit-level Meeting of the NAM Contact Group in response to COVID-19 under the theme “*United against COVID-19*” on 4 May 2020. As a practical outcome of this meeting the Member States of the Movement decided to establish the Task Force in response to COVID-19 and to work out a database on the basic humanitarian and medical needs and requirements of NAM Member States in their fight against COVID-19.

We are pleased to know that WHO uses the NAM database as one of its reference points for identifying the existing needs of NAM Member states in addressing the pandemic.

The Non-Aligned Movement praises the activities of the United Nations system in response to the Covid-19. We commend strong leadership of the Secretary-General, who played a central role in spearheading the United Nations global response to the pandemic, while at the same time ensuring continuity of operations of the UN Secretariat. The Movement fully supports the WHO and its leadership in their critical role in providing guidance, training, equipment and concrete life-saving services, in order to ensure effective response of the international community to the ever-increasing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has exposed and aggravated vulnerabilities and inequalities in both developing and developed countries, and also among them, deepening poverty and exclusion and pushing the most vulnerable even further behind. It is the poorest and most vulnerable who were hit the hardest by this pandemic and NAM is gravely concerned that the further impact of the crisis will reverse hard-won development gains and hamper progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We also note with concern that the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated existing fundamental impediments, which most recently were addressed during the 18th NAM Summit in 2019 in Baku, such as impacts of global financial and economic crises, continuing lack of resources and underdevelopment of the majority of the developing world, continuing unequal terms of trade and lack



CHAIR OF THE COORDINATING BUREAU OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT



of cooperation from developed countries, the coercive and unilateral measures imposed by some of them, as well as use of force or threats of use of force, in the way towards a just and equitable world order.

NAM stresses the importance of affordable, unhindered and equitable access by all countries to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment, which should constitute an integral part of a coordinated and effective global response to COVID-19.

As many vaccines against COVID-19 are being currently studied, we are all looking forward to the successful outcome of clinical trials and hope that a safe and effective vaccine will soon be available, and that they will be considered as global public goods ensuring their universal distribution at affordable prices for all. We appreciate the coordination efforts of WHO in this process and stress the importance of this Organization in facilitating equitable access of people throughout the globe to such vaccine, once it is available.

Mr. President,

It is through a coordinated and concerted global response based on unity, multilateral cooperation, solidarity and respect for human rights that the international community can craft strategies to mitigate effects of COVID-19 and recover from the pandemic, which currently continues to spread.

This special session will serve broad objectives, such as reaffirming and strengthening commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism, highlighting best practices, as well as challenges of UN Member States in responding to the pandemic, and reflecting on the central position of the United Nations through providing an opportunity for open and transparent discussions among Member States, Observer States, observers, relevant UN agencies and bodies and other stakeholders. We look forward to fruitful deliberations throughout the session.

Thank you.

APPENDIX C

- Statement by H.E. Volkan Bozkir, President of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly
- Remarks by H.E. Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General's of the United Nations
- Presentation by Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization



Second Day of the 31st Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly in Response to the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19 Pandemic) – (Opening)

- As delivered -

Statement by H.E. Volkan Bozkir, President of the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly

4 December 2020

Excellencies,

I welcome you back to the General Assembly Hall for the second day of this historic United Nations General Assembly special session, on the coronavirus disease COVID-19.

Yesterday, during the General debate of the 31st special session, we heard from Member States at the highest political level. Their interventions illustrated the need for a comprehensive multilateral approach to combat a disease, which does not recognize borders. Once again, I thank all speakers for their interventions and their renewed commitment to the people we serve.

Today, in line with the request of Member States, a series of interactive dialogues will offer us an opportunity to listen to, and learn from, experts and stakeholders, who are working tirelessly to create a better world.

Beginning with a session on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic we will delve into the health and humanitarian response. Thereafter, we will discuss the road to a COVID-19 vaccine, the key to unlocking our recovery. Finally, we will turn to deliberating how we can all 'recover better' as we deal with the socio-economic impact of the pandemic.

We cannot neglect our duties to the people we serve at this time of crisis, when it is even more important. We must work towards lasting peace, sustainable development and the protection of human rights if we are to create the future we want.

I look forward to a day of learning, which I trust, will bring us one step closer to ending this pandemic.

I thank you very much.

04 December 2020

Deputy Secretary-General's remarks to the General Assembly Special Session in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic [as prepared for delivery]

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

I thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this Special Session and for ensuring that the General Assembly fulfils its role as the global townhall of our global village.

This is an important opportunity to hear from Member States, United Nations entities and a range of non-governmental partners about the innovative ways they are working together to respond to the pandemic and build a strong recovery.

Today, UN principals will share updates on what we have achieved together with Member States, right across our different pillars of work and in very diverse country contexts; what is needed to ensure access to vaccines, tests and treatments for all; to meet ongoing humanitarian needs; and to support a recovery that will reignite the Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs.

Excellencies,

The UN's immediate response to the pandemic focused on delivering support for governments and people on the ground, together with extensive global advocacy and policy efforts.

Our strategy has three complementary tracks: supporting the continued delivery of **health** services, responding to **humanitarian** needs; and supporting national Governments with their emergency **socio-economic response** and recovery efforts.

Through these three complementary tracks, the UN supported lives and livelihoods, keeping vital services accessible, kept households afloat, businesses solvent and supply chains functioning while placing human rights at the forefront.

So far, these efforts have helped 71 countries implement over 300 social protection policies, supported the provision of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene supplies to 25 million people, and helped more than 100,000 companies stay afloat.

This was made possible through the enabling environment created by governments and commitment of our staff; the support we received from our partners; and the new arrangements in place in a strengthened UN development system. I commend everyone involved.

But we are keenly aware that our response must go further.

As the Secretary-General said, it is time to reset.

The decisions taken over the next twelve months will have impacts for decades to come.

It is essential that they be geared towards reducing poverty and inequality; realizing the rights of all women and girls; and transitioning to a green economy that provides decent work for all.

This will not be easy but the United Nations stands ready to lend its full support to your efforts, including in the following five key areas.

First, vaccination is an important step in our global journey to recovery. We are doing everything possible to mobilise the \$28 billion needed for the ACT-Accelerator and its COVAX Facility. And our country teams are ready to support the immediate roll-out of available vaccines and treatments once resources are met.

Second, building off the analysis and preparations under the UN Socio-Economic Framework and the long-awaited finance response to stimulus packages, UN country teams are standing by to support governments in operationalizing inclusive and sustainable recovery plans.

Third, in the next few months, we will push for strong action to repair our planet with updated Nationally Determined Contributions on climate and a new Global Biodiversity Framework in Kunming.

Fourth, we are bringing stakeholders together in 2021 to seek solutions, in areas from food systems to education, gender equality to oceans, energy to digital connectivity and transport.

Finally, we will strengthen our efforts to mobilize greater resources for countries and people in greatest need, based on the policy options that emerged from the Initiative on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond.

With your support, we will find solutions to increase fiscal space; expand social protection and deliver on the climate finance and Addis Ababa Action Agenda commitments.

Excellencies,

This Special Session comes at a critical moment.

If we make the right decisions now, we can meet humanitarian needs, reset development pathways, accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and secure a life of dignity and opportunity for all, on a safe and healthy planet.

That is the task ahead of us in 2021.

We look forward to working with you all to seize this opportunity to deliver on our promises for people, for planet.

Thank you.

WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session - 4 December 2020

4 December 2020

Your Excellency Volkan Bozkir, President of the General Assembly,

Madam Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohamed,

Excellencies, my dear sisters and brothers,

75 years ago, as the world lay smouldering from the second global conflict in 30 years, a new project was conceived – a project born of suffering, death and loss, but also of hope, and the blinding realization that there is no future but a common future.

That project, of course, was the United Nations.

In the past 75 years, the UN has had many successes, and many challenges.

But none more than the COVID-19 pandemic, which has strained the very fabric of multilateralism.

There have been challenges and lessons to learn for all us, but the pandemic has demonstrated what the UN at its best can do.

Although COVID-19 is a health crisis, it has had implications for every area of the UN's work.

In the earliest days of the pandemic, the Secretary-General and I agreed to trigger the UN Crisis Management Team, which has been led by WHO's Head of Emergencies, Dr Mike Ryan;

We've worked with colleagues across the UN family in multiple areas including supply chains, travel, communications, mass gatherings, the animal-human interface, joint work in countries and much more.

For example, we worked closely with the World Food Programme, UNICEF and other partners to establish the UN Supply Chain Platform, delivering millions of tests and items of PPE to 179 countries and territories;

I would like to especially thank Atul Khare, Mark Lowcock, Melissa Fleming, Robert Piper, Amer Daouidi and others for their partnership and support.

The pandemic has shown what humanity is capable of at its best, and worst:

Inspiring acts of compassion and self-sacrifice; breathtaking feats of science and innovation; and heart-warming demonstrations of solidarity;

But also disturbing signs of self-interest, blame-shifting and division.

More than 60 million cases of COVID-19 have now been reported to WHO, and 1.5 million people have lost their lives.

Although this is a global health crisis, it's important to remember that not all countries have responded equally, and not all countries have been affected equally.

Many countries have succeeded in preventing or containing widespread transmission of COVID-19 with proven public health tools.

This is not a fluke of geography or demography.

These countries have proven that with science, solidarity and sacrifice, this virus can be tamed.

But where science is drowned out by conspiracy theories;

Where solidarity is undermined by division;

Where sacrifice is substituted with self-interest;

The virus thrives. The virus spreads.

===

Today I would like to outline four key areas in which we need the leadership of nations – as United Nations – to end the pandemic and build the post-pandemic world.

First, invest in vaccines to end the pandemic.

With positive results in recent weeks from vaccine trials, the light at the end of the tunnel is growing steadily brighter.

Although the path ahead remains treacherous, we can begin to glimpse the end of the pandemic.

But let me be clear: we simply cannot accept a world in which the poor and marginalized are trampled by the rich and powerful in the stampede for vaccines.

This is a global crisis, and the solutions must be shared equitably as global public goods, not as private commodities that widen inequalities and become yet another reason some people are left behind. No one should be left behind.

This is true between countries, and within countries.

The task of narrowing inequalities does not start after the pandemic. It must be part and parcel of the response.

If the world fails this test, what hope is there of living up to the scope and scale of the Sustainable Development Goals?

In April, with support from many partners, WHO established the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator.

This is a completely unprecedented partnership with two aims: to develop vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics fast; and allocate and deliver them fairly.

Already the ACT Accelerator has delivered real results.

We have reached agreement for the purchase of 120 million low-cost, rapid diagnostic tests for low- and middle-income countries.

We have secured supplies of dexamethasone – the only medicine shown to reduce the risk of death from COVID-19 – for up to 4.5 million patients in lower-income countries.

And as part of the ACT Accelerator, 189 countries and economies are participating in the COVAX facility.

But unless the ACT Accelerator is fully funded, it is in danger of becoming no more than a noble gesture.

The ACT Accelerator faces an immediate funding gap of 4.3 billion US dollars to lay the groundwork for the mass procurement and delivery of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. A further 23.9 billion dollars will be needed next year.

Let me put that in perspective: that's less than half of one percent of the 11 trillion dollars of stimulus packages announced by G20 countries so far.

Vaccines are an investment that will be repaid rapidly and many times over.

Sharing the fruits of science is not charity, it's in the best interests of every nation.

===

Second, invest in preparedness to prevent the next pandemic.

Despite years of warnings, many countries were simply not ready for COVID-19.

Many mistakenly assumed their strong health systems would protect them.

Many of the countries that have done best are those with recent experience of responding to outbreaks of SARS, MERS, H1N1 and other infectious diseases.

Now all countries must develop that same "muscle memory" and invest in the measures that will predict, prevent, control and mitigate the next crisis.

It's also clear that the global system for preparedness needs attention.

The International Health Regulations is a powerful legal tool, but countries must use it more effectively.

It's clear that the IHR can only be successful if it's based on mutual trust, mutual accountability, mutual transparency and robust political legitimacy.

In September I established a committee to review the functioning of the International Health Regulations during the pandemic, and to provide recommendations on how to strengthen its implementation – including the binary mechanism for declaring a public health emergency of international concern.

WHO is also engaging with several countries on developing and piloting a new mechanism, the Universal Health and Preparedness Review, in which countries agree to a regular and transparent process of peer review, similar to the Universal Periodic Review used by the Human Rights Council.

In addition, we welcome the initiative proposed by the President of the European Council, my friend Charles Michel for an international treaty to provide the political underpinning for strengthening the implementation of the International Health Regulations and global health security. Thank you so much, President Michel.

The pandemic has also shown that there is an urgent need for a globally agreed system for sharing pathogen materials and clinical samples, to facilitate the rapid development of medical countermeasures as global public goods.

Switzerland has generously offered the use of a high-security laboratory at which WHO would manage a new “biobank”, and we are now developing the framework under which samples would be provided and shared.

And I would like to use this opportunity to thank Thailand and Italy for being the first two volunteers to deposit samples in the bank.

===

Third, invest in health as the foundation of peace and prosperity.

The pandemic has proven that a health crisis is not just a health crisis; it is a social, economic, political and humanitarian crisis.

Millions of people have lost their livelihoods, the global economy has been plunged into its sharpest downturn since the Great Depression, geopolitical fissures have widened, and the multilateral system has been called into question.

The risks of under-investment in health have wide-ranging impacts, and so do the benefits of investing in health.

My sister Amina, you have described health as the “docking station” for all of the Sustainable Development Goals. I couldn’t agree more.

Health is an investment in successful societies. It enables individuals, families, communities and nations to flourish.

The world spends 7.5 trillion dollars on health every year – almost 10% of global GDP.

But most of this spending is in the richest countries, and is disproportionately directed to treating disease, rather than promoting and protecting health.

We need a radical rethink of the way we view and value health.

Accordingly, I have established a new Council on the Economics of Health for All, to examine and elucidate the links between health and inclusive, innovation-led economic growth.

The council will be chaired by the distinguished economist Professor Mariana Mazzucato, and Her Excellency Sanaa Marin, the Prime Minister of Finland, has generously agreed to be its patron. Kiitos, Your Excellency.

The good news is that there is already strong political commitment for health.

At last year's General Assembly, all UN Member States converged to endorse the high-level political declaration on universal health coverage.

You embraced a vision for a world in which all people have access to essential health services, without facing financial hardship.

The pandemic has only underlined why universal health coverage is so important.

In the face of the pandemic, many countries have offered free testing and treatment for COVID-19, and have promised free vaccination for their populations.

They have recognized that the ability to pay should not be the difference between sickness and health; between life and death.

Shouldn't that also be true for a crisis like cancer, heart disease, HIV, TB or malaria? Shouldn't it also be true for services like routine immunization, maternal care and tobacco control, which can prevent a crisis – and the costs of dealing with it?

Universal health coverage is built on strong health systems.

Many of the countries hit hardest by COVID-19 are those with highly medicalized health systems, with access to the world's most advanced drugs, devices and specialists.

Those things have great value, but too many countries have neglected investments in basic public health functions, which need very small investment, and are the bedrock of safe and healthy nations.

In particular, strong primary health care is the eyes and ears of every health system, and is essential for preventing and responding to emergencies of all kinds, from the personal crisis of a heart attack to an outbreak of a new and deadly virus, like this one.

If the world is to avoid another crisis on this scale, investments in basic public health functions – and especially primary health care – are essential.

All roads should lead to universal health coverage, with a strong foundation of primary health care.

===

And fourth, invest in multilateralism to safeguard our common future.

A vaccine will help to end the pandemic. But it will not address the vulnerabilities that lie at its root.

There is no vaccine for poverty.

There is no vaccine for hunger.

There is no vaccine for inequality.

There is no vaccine for climate change.

Once the pandemic ends, we will be left with even greater challenges than before it started.

In 2015, the nations of the world adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, with their sweeping vision for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

The same year, nations adopted the Paris Agreement and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on finance for development, which I had the honour to chair.

The world converged around a common vision for the future.

But in the years since, we have witnessed a dangerous divergence.

The Paris Agreement has been undermined; the commitments made in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda have gone largely unfulfilled; and although there has been progress toward the SDGs, too often our efforts have remained siloed and splintered.

Together, we must once again choose convergence, choose collaboration, choose cooperation, choose solidarity. Convergence and divergence are a choice.

Together, we must heed the Secretary-General's clarion call for a Decade of Action to pursue the SDGs with even more innovation and determination. Thank you, Secretary-General.

Last year, WHO and 11 other multilateral agencies came together to launch the Global Action Plan on Healthy Lives and Well-being for All, to support countries to accelerate towards the health-related SDG targets.

That type of collaboration – between partners and between countries – must be the hallmark of the post-pandemic era.

Together we have shown that in the face of a global crisis, the world can come together in new ways to solve urgent problems.

And together, we must harness that same urgency and innovation to address the full range of challenges we face.

No one else will do it, and it cannot wait.

It must be us, and it must be now.

Humanity has overcome many plagues and pandemics before, and we will overcome this one.

But we cannot – we must not – go back to the same exploitative patterns of production and consumption, the same disregard for the planet that sustains all life, the same cycle of panic and neglect, and the same divisive politics that fueled this pandemic.

The pandemic has brought us to a fork in the road.

Behind us lies the path of business as usual – the path that led us to this crisis.

Before us lies a new path: a path on which nations do not see themselves as rivals in a zero-sum game, but as fellow-travelers with the same aspirations, hopes and dreams;

A vision that affirms our common history and our common future;

That recognizes we are richer for our diversity, and that we are more than the sum of our parts. Our diversity is our beauty, and our strength.

75 years after its birth, the United Nations remains more relevant than ever, and more essential than ever.

WHO is proud to be part of the UN family.

And we remain committed to working with all countries to ensure the United Nations lives up to its name and aspirations.

Thank you.