

## THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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### REMARKS TO SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN VIDEO-TELECONFERENCE ON PEACEBUILDING AND SUSTAINING PEACE: PANDEMICS AND THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINING PEACE

12 August 2020

[as delivered]

Let me begin by thanking the Indonesian Presidency for convening this open debate on pandemics and the challenges of sustaining peace.

The concept of sustaining peace is essentially about positive peace as opposed to simply ending wars.

In other words, it is the idea that the international community accompanies a country well beyond the point of simply putting down guns to the point where people feel protected and represented. Where trust and the social fabric are going in the right direction and not in the wrong direction. But the unprecedented challenges from COVID-19 clearly risk pushing things in the wrong direction.

As I highlighted in my previous briefings to the Council, the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated communities and economies throughout the world, affecting the poorest and most vulnerable the most.

The pandemic threatens not only hard-won development and peacebuilding gains, but also risks exacerbating conflicts or fomenting new ones.

Questions are growing about the effectiveness of health systems, social services, trust in institutions and systems of governance.

All of this means that our commitment to sustaining peace is more urgent than ever.

The challenges of this pandemic underscore like never before the imperative of coherent, multi-dimensional and cross-pillar responses along the integrated logic of the Sustainable Development Goals.

We know that conflict-sensitive and coherent, preventative approaches that help address the health and humanitarian crisis will help deliver sustainable peace.

But as we scan the horizon, I see three key dangers.

First, the erosion of public trust. Pandemics can undermine faith in governments and public institutions. The perception that authorities are mishandling the crisis, or not being transparent or favouring political allies can lead to public disillusion in government and its institutions.

Second, the destabilization of the global economic order. I am particularly concerned about the effects of heightened socio-economic vulnerabilities, fueled by an unprecedented global economic

crisis. Without concerted action, inequalities, global poverty and the potential for instability and violence could grow for years.

Third, the weakening of the social fabric -- represented in, for example, the narrowing of civic space and the closing of avenues for democratic process and legitimate expression of grievances. We have seen many peaceful protests, and in a number of countries, COVID-19 has been an excuse for harsh crackdowns and a spike in state repression.

At least 23 countries have postponed national elections or referenda, and almost twice as many have postponed subnational votes.

Despite challenges, the pandemic also creates opportunities for peace.

The appeal for a global ceasefire earlier this year prompted positive responses from governments and non-State actors across the globe.

A number of conflict parties took steps to de-escalate and stop fighting. Yet, regrettably, in many instances, the pandemic did not move the parties to suspend hostilities or agree to a permanent ceasefire.

Last month's adoption of Security Council resolution 2532 -- which demanded a general and immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda -- is a step in the right direction, but much more is needed to translate early gains into concrete action on the ground.

The Council also plays an important role in bringing its influence to bear for an investment in prevention.

In the current context that means several things.

First, our responses to the pandemic must be conflict-sensitive, starting with a multidimensional analysis that looks at how the pandemic affects underlying risks that drive conflict.

Second, inclusion is critical in the design of humanitarian and development responses to pandemics.

Dialogues, especially with communities and marginalized groups, help rebuild trust and enhance social cohesion.

In particular, we must find avenues for far stronger engagement with women's groups who play such a pivotal role in securing peace at the community level.

They are also critical rebuilders of trust which is often absent in fragile and fractured communities, and without which public health messaging and behavioural change to slow the pandemic simply does not take root.

Young people are also essential to peacebuilding solutions.

Third, sustaining peace requires an integrated and coherent approach through strong collaboration across humanitarian, development and peace actors.

For example, to sustain peace, we need to ensure that humanitarian challenges are fully addressed in a comprehensive way. Lebanon is a case in point.

We also need to build ever stronger partnerships with governments, regional and sub-regional organizations, the private sector and civil society actors.

And we must underscore the importance of ensuring that International Financial Institutions - - the World Bank, the IMF and others -- integrate sustaining peace as a priority and as a core element of COVID-19 recovery strategies and building back better.

The Council's ongoing collaboration with the Peacebuilding Commission is critical. Your complementary efforts can help marshal a collaborative response to the peacebuilding impact of the pandemic, drawing on lessons from previous health crises such as the Ebola outbreak.

My forthcoming report next month -- a key input to the 2020 review of the UN peacebuilding architecture -- highlights substantial progress in fostering a systemic focus on prevention and a multi-dimensional approach to peace in closer alignment with the development and human rights pillars and humanitarian actors.

Fourth, we need to be flexible and tailor our approach to peacebuilding needs in the context of the pandemic.

The Peacebuilding Fund has swiftly adjusted its work on the ground and identified new areas of support in response to COVID-19, seeking ways to shore up relations among communities, counter hate speech, reduce stigmatization and strengthen inclusion.

Unfortunately, the demand for the Fund continues to outpace supply. We hope to approve US\$210 million in projects this year but that is still far short of the "quantum leap" I have called for in this Council and elsewhere.

With a global spike in violence against women and girls, the Spotlight Initiative has repurposed some \$20 million towards the COVID-19 response, much of this in fragile, conflict-affected or humanitarian settings.

But this is only a fraction of what is needed to tackle what has been termed a 'shadow pandemic'. Gender-based violence is a pervasive form of violence and insecurity that undermines our best efforts to build sustainable peace.

I am heartened by some countries' willingness to think about how we can achieve adequate and predictable financing for peacebuilding -- which is the best defense against conflict, and building a more equal and sustainable future for all.

My report in September will make suggestions to that end.

COVID-19 is a human tragedy -- but we can mitigate the impacts by the choices we make.

More than ever, multidimensional, coordinated and conflict-sensitive responses and whole-of-society approaches are crucial.

They are key to ensuring that peacebuilding and sustaining peace initiatives go hand-in-hand with inclusive and sustainable development, anchored in the protection and promotion of human rights, gender equality, and the commitment to leave no one behind.

The world is looking to all leaders -- including the Council -- to address this epic crisis in ways that make a concrete, meaningful and positive contribution to the lives of people.

It is our responsibility to deliver.

Thank you.