

THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

**REMARKS AT MEETING WITH THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

New York, 21 April 2020

Excellencies,

Thank you for the invitation to take part in this virtual joint meeting of the Executive Boards.

I commend respective Chairs for the important steps they are taking to ensure coherence across the work of the Executive Boards. This meeting is yet another example.

I also welcome the presence of my colleagues – The Principals of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNWOMEN, UNOPS, WFP and WHO.

These agencies represent a large footprint of our operational activities on the ground. Working together, the support they offer to countries and communities can make a real difference in the battle against COVID.

As Chair of the UNSDG, I am grateful for their leadership in ensuring a strong and agile UN response to the unprecedented challenges ushered in by COVID-19

From the onset of the pandemic, these entities have worked hand-in-hand with the Secretary-General to define the elements of a UN response that cuts across health, humanitarian and development dimensions.

They have released critical guidance on all aspects of the pandemic and managed to maintain a robust footprint on the ground, with as little disruption as possible.

They contributed to the development of a global socio-economic response framework, in record time, which will provide a strategy and a menu of options for UN country teams everywhere.

The UN development system has worked closely with our Resident Coordinators to ensure a coordinated response on the ground.

I am deeply grateful to:

- Dr. Tedros for his leadership against the pandemic and for briefing all Resident Coordinators last week.**
- To Marc Lowcock for working closely with DCO to ensure synergies in addressing the humanitarian and development dimensions of COVID-19.**
- To Achim Steiner, for rapidly reorienting UNDP's integrator platform role to support RCs and UNCTs in their collective efforts to address the socio-economic impacts of COVID.**

- **To David Beasley and Grete Faremo for the ensuring that WFP and UNOPS provide essential support to countries as part of the coordinated U.N. supply chain pipeline.**
- **And to Henrietta Fore, Natalia Kanem and Phumzile Ngucka for leading the effort to protect and empower children, youth and women as part of the COVID-19 recovery and response effort.**

Our common objective is clear: responding to the various effects of COVID-19, while helping Governments recover better, with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as our guiding light.

Excellencies,

We are facing a development emergency. COVID-19 may have put a pause on life as we know it, but not on climate change or poverty. Inequalities and vulnerabilities are being exacerbated.

Acting fast on all fronts will ensure we do not ask humanity to face choiceless choices between health and socio-economic development. We must tackle both dimensions, simultaneously, if we are to win the battle against COVID19.

While the world prepared to accelerate action towards the 2030 Agenda, COVID-19 has placed the bar even higher. We must be respond with determination to ensure countries remain on track towards the SDGs. Our development programmes across the world must proceed – in spite of COVID-19. Livelihoods depend on this imperative.

This will entail different responses, by making adjustments in our portfolio and repurpose funds at times, to respond to the immediate threats posed by COVID-19.

Such efforts have already started, in close collaboration with programme countries, donors and partners.

Executive Boards have a critical role in ensuring agencies have the ability to adapt and recalibrate their action as rapidly as possible.

Excellencies,

I had the opportunity brief you on our response to COVID-19 over the last few weeks, in plenary meetings and smaller group settings. My colleagues will elaborate further today.

We have listened carefully to your comments, questions and concerns, which have helped enrich our response.

Your strong engagement is a confirmation that we need to keep our communication channels fully open and respond to your pressing issues.

Allow me to address some of the main questions you raised during our last interactions:

First, several Member States are calling for support in the procurement of emergency medical equipment and to avoid disruptions to the supply chains.

I want to assure you that this is an integral part of our efforts. The UNDS is providing direct procurement support to countries and helping facilitate the distribution of core essential health service supplies.

WHO is convening an interagency task-force dedicated to supply chains, working closely with the Department of Operational Support, to leverage existing UN supply chain networks.

Second, several delegations pointed to the need to recognize the impact of COVID-19 of the economies of developing and middle-income countries.

This is indeed at the heart of our response – from the Secretary-General’s advocacy to world leaders and IFIs – including for an ambitious debt relief initiative – a message amplified by Achim Steiner in the Spring Meetings; to the socio-economic framework for action developed by the UNSDG; to the work on the ground by our UNCTs.

Third, many countries have stressed the need to place gender equality at the center of the UN response.

We share the same vision. COVID19 challenges the world’s promise to leave no one behind. In response, we must redouble our commitment. UNWOMEN and UNFPA are playing a key role in helping us address the disproportion effects of the pandemic on women – at home, in the health sector and the economy at large.

Our Country Teams are also working with national and local social services to ensure continuity of the first line of response for children, women, and families at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, neglect and family separation.

Fourth, we agree with the point raised by several delegations on the importance to ensure that the COVID19 response is anchored in the 2030 Agenda and Climate commitments.

Staying focused on these transformative frameworks is the best way to reduce human suffering now and tomorrow.

Finally, we heard calls for further information on the Secretary-General's UN Response and Recovery Fund. You have now received the ToRs for the Fund and we have explained how the Fund complements other critical instruments. The Fund has already launched a first call and we want the first set of projects to commence on 1st May.

In this first phase, a limited number of countries were targeted. Others will be included as resources increase.

We are grateful to the Member States who already committed funds to catalyze our socio-economic response – Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland. This week we will be launching an appeal to ensure others also step up to support.

The Secretary-General and I are acutely aware of the already high demands on public funds; but funding the COVID-19 response is a critical investment needed to suppress the transmission of the virus and ensure we can emerge out of this crisis, better.

We are not asking you to prioritize between Funds – our health response, humanitarian appeal and socio-economic action are mutually reinforcing. We need to charge ahead on all these fronts.

Finally, we echo your call to uphold the spirit of reform and ensure strong coordination at the country level, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator.

The COVID-19 pandemic represents, indeed, a true test for our reform agenda. The time has come to fully leverage on the transformation we sought through resolution 72/279.

And results speak for themselves.

Resident Coordinators have been at the center of the COVID-19 response, relying on and supporting the technical lead of WHO for the health response, OCHA for the humanitarian emergency and looking to UNDP for the socio-economic response and recovery.

All these actors have embraced the full expertise of their UNCTs through integrated responses.

Leadership by Member States has been critical to take us this far. Your call for coordination and transparency in these very Boards and in your bilateral relation with each entity has helped send the signals for transformative change.

As we face COVID-19, your voice will be more important than ever. We count on you to continue to hold us accountable as we respond together to the pandemic.

Even more than before, the entire system must work together at country level, with discipline and rallying behind the convening power of RCs to help countries respond to COVID-19.

We simply cannot afford duplication or inefficiencies in this existential battle.

Excellencies,

You can count on our full determination to leverage our reformed footprint to help you defeat this virus and mitigate the various impacts of this crisis.

The entire UN development system is mobilized to ensure the promise of a more prosperous future for all gets realized.

Together, we will prevail.

Thank you.

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