

UN Security Council Open VTC Debate
“Maintenance of international peace and security:
Implications of Covid-19”
(2 July 2020)

INDIA STATEMENT

We thank Security Council President Ambassador Christoph Heusgen of Germany for convening today’s important discussion on the implication of COVID-19 pandemic on international peace and security.

2. We also congratulate Germany on assuming Presidency of the Security Council in July. The briefings by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, President of the ICRC Peter Mauer, and AU Commissioner for Social Affairs Amira Elfadil Mohamed have provided useful insights into the various dimensions of the pandemic.

3. COVID-19 has caused global disruption on a scale that has not been experienced before by this generation. The disruptive effect of the pandemic is still playing out, and the implications will be profound and multidimensional. However, we need to remember that COVID-19 is **foremost a health crisis**, with far-reaching **economic** and **humanitarian** implications. It is not primarily an international peace and security issue, and we need to be mindful of this aspect.

4. Pandemics can exacerbate the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict. They also present obstacles to traditional tools for conflict resolution and maintenance of peace and security, including **UN peacekeeping and peacekeeping operations**.

5. Consequently, the Security Council’s efforts in this scenario must focus on the impact of the crisis on the functioning of peacekeeping missions, and on ensuring the continuity of peace processes. There has already been an **impact on the operational capabilities of UN**

peacekeeping missions, largely due to the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus such as restrictions on movement and deployments.

6. Despite these restrictions, it is heartening to see that the peacekeeping missions are **adapting and updating their contingency plans** to ensure the safety of their personnel; protect their capacity to continue critical operations; help contain and mitigate the spread of the virus; and continue to deliver on key mandates. Equally importantly, they are also **helping host countries in their COVID-19 response**, including through treatment, capacity-building activities with local authorities, logistics, awareness-raising, and the distribution of medical equipment.

7. As a leading contributor of troops, including women peacekeepers, **India is proud to be a part of COVID-19 relief efforts**. India has just responded to the Secretary General's immediate requirement for **upgrading the medical facilities** of UN peacekeeping missions, by agreeing to deploy **additional medical personnel and equipment** to the military hospitals in Goma (MONUSCO) and Juba (UNMISS).

8. In situations where **peace processes or transitions** are underway, COVID-19 restrictions may have **stalled progress**, including through electoral postponements - risking the loss of fragile gains made in the months preceding the pandemic. However, we should be careful not to exaggerate the issue. In fact, there is cause for some hope. In situations where in-person meetings and interactions have been restricted, the increased **use of technological platforms** has the potential to present new opportunities, by enhancing the **inclusiveness of peace processes**, including the participation of women and youth.

9. Even as the world comes together to tackle this challenge, the most egregious threat to international peace and security remains alive: that of **terrorism and its supporting networks**. Terrorist groups will seek to exploit the situation, taking advantage of diverted government attention and resources, to launch new offensives. Terrorists and terrorist entities have also incorporated COVID-19 narratives into their **radicalization and**

recruitment efforts. Sections of society that have been most adversely affected by the disruption caused by the virus are easy targets for recruitment. The lockdowns by governments and the enforcement of quarantine laws have been negatively interpreted and have begun to feature prominently in terrorist propaganda. We must remain ever-vigilant against such trends.

10. One of the key questions in the comprehensive concept note circulated for this debate is, what are the **'triggers'** that can transform a health crisis into a security crisis. We believe that one of these triggers is the **malicious intent of those who seek to exploit the public sense of fear and anxiety during a health crisis** to sow distrust and enmity among communities and nations at large.

11. The **'infodemic'** confronting us therefore, is as virulent as the COVID-19 pandemic. Such proliferation of fake news, doctored media, and false narratives threatens to divide societies and create instability in many regions. We need a strong international commitment to counter this scourge, while protecting the space for informed public discourse. In this context, India was pleased to be part of the cross-regional group presenting a Joint Statement on the ongoing 'Infodemic' in the context of COVID-19 at the UN.

12. Another important issue is how to minimize the **negative impact of pandemics on those who are the most vulnerable**, including in armed conflict situations. Women constitute more than half of the global healthcare force, and are courageously serving on the frontlines as medical professionals, emergency workers, caregivers, and other essential personnel. Despite this, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a **disproportionate social and economic impact on women and children**. We must ensure that responses to the pandemic ensure that the most vulnerable are protected.

13. There are of course other issues which do not have direct peace and security dimensions and may not trigger them. As we evolve a **collective**

response to the pandemic, it is important that we learn from each other's **best practices and experiences**. None of us can be secure unless we are all secure. We must continue to work together to plan for **safe and sustained economic recovery and growth**, resilience of vital supply chains, and for speedy development and dissemination of vaccines and therapeutics.

14. Despite the ongoing pandemic and the challenges to global supply chain networks, India continues to cater to over 60% of global demand for various vaccines, and is the leading supplier for UN entities such as UNICEF and UNFPA. We have also pledged USD 15 million in support to GAVI, the international vaccine alliance.

15. As India continues to deal with considerable demands of handling the consequences of the pandemic on a billion-strong population, we have continued to **extend a helping hand** to our partners around the world, in keeping with our civilizational ethos of seeing The World As One Family. We have done so by sharing our country's available stocks of medicines and sending medical teams to over 120 countries. We have also forged a common response strategy in our immediate neighborhood.

16. The **India-UN Development Partnership Fund** is working rapidly to support projects responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in countries that need such assistance. These include projects supplying medical equipment, building healthcare capacities, mitigating socio-economic impact and catalyzing transformative recovery.

17. Finally, a key takeaway from this unprecedented global experience: the complex challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated that our collective response to such crises can only be effective if our **processes and institutions are representative of contemporary realities**. This moment is a wake-up call for us to work towards a reformed and reinvigorated multilateralism, purpose-built to address today's challenges.
