

**Security Council**

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**Letter dated 22 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of  
Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

I have the honour to inform you that, under the presidency of Germany in July, the Security Council plans to hold a high-level open debate on the theme “Pandemics and security”, on 2 July 2020.

In preparation for the meeting, Germany has prepared the attached concept note (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Christoph **Heusgen**



## **Annex to the letter dated 22 June 2020 from the Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General**

### **Concept note for the high-level open debate of the Security Council on the theme “Pandemics and security”, to be held on 2 July 2020 at 10 a.m.**

#### **Background and developments**

1. Global health risks, such as pandemics and epidemics, can become a threat to international peace and security. Striking examples of epidemics turning into global health risks include the epidemics of severe acute respiratory syndrome, HIV/AIDS and Ebola virus disease. In the case of Ebola, the Security Council determined in its resolution [2177 \(2014\)](#) that the outbreak constituted a threat to international peace and security and undermined the stability of the most affected countries, possibly leading to further instances of civil unrest, social tensions and the deterioration of the political and security climate.
2. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, with more than 400,000 victims to date, has become a global public health emergency and has challenged global cooperation, including in the framework of the United Nations.
3. So far, the most immediate impact of COVID-19 on conflict settings has been a deterioration of the humanitarian situation. For instance, in Yemen, the virus is spreading throughout the country and overwhelming an already failing health-care system. In addition, ongoing ceasefire negotiations of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Yemen are further complicated owing to the uncoordinated response to the outbreak.
4. In the mid and long term, there is reason to be concerned about the far-reaching economic and social consequences of COVID-19, which are likely to have an impact on political stability in many countries. The pandemic is in fact exacerbating root causes of armed conflict: unemployment, inequalities, social stigma and distrust in State institutions. These are all strong possible indicators of emerging or prolonged violence.
5. The economic and social impact of COVID-19 carries the risk of destabilizing countries with weak governance and little resilience. Weak governance combined with a failure to support and protect the population may encourage people to revolt or to fight for resources. The spread of the virus and its implications also hamper development and social progress and curtail human rights, hitting the most vulnerable hardest and destroying prospects of improved living conditions. Women are those hardest hit economically and are most affected by a sharp increase in gender-based violence.
6. Overall, armed conflict has devastating consequences for health systems and for protecting civilians from a potential health crisis by destroying medical infrastructure. The delivery of medical care is often impossible. The social role of women is weakened, their contributions to the health of communities limited. Disease prevalence grows both in and around the conflict areas. In South Sudan, for example, the effects of fighting and displacement have increased vulnerability to cholera, meningitis and Rift Valley fever. It has also been found that social polarization and fear of others, community rumours and distrust in public institutions in conflict-affected contexts can prolong or lengthen the “tail” of infectious diseases outbreaks and prevent effective international and local responses.

7. It is for these reasons that, on 23 March 2020, the Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire in an attempt to reduce the effect of conflict on the COVID-19 pandemic. His call has been endorsed by 114 Governments, regional organizations and leaders so far. Numerous civil society groups and 16 armed groups have supported the call. The Secretary-General has also called, in his statement of 23 April 2020, to put human rights centre stage in the global response to COVID-19.

8. COVID-19 has had an unprecedented impact on United Nations peace operations. Both field missions and the Secretariat have had to adapt quickly. In the mid and long term, lessons learned from COVID-19 and previous health crises need to lead to increased resilience and capacities of United Nations peace operations vis-à-vis pandemics.

9. As part of the efforts of the United Nations, and in parallel with the development and the human rights pillars, the Security Council should address the question of how to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on peace and security in the most vulnerable settings as part of its preventive action.

### **Objective and scope**

10. The aim of this open debate is to exchange views on the security implications of international health threats, epidemics and pandemics and the corresponding role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace and security.

11. Member States are encouraged to share their experience with and assessment of the following questions:

- What are the “triggers” that transform a health crisis into a security crisis?
- To what extent and how do pandemics exacerbate the humanitarian impact of conflict situations? And conversely, to what extent and how do conditions of violence and instability in conflict situations exacerbate pandemics?
- How can Member States minimize the negative impact of epidemics and pandemics, especially on the most vulnerable?
- What lessons pertaining to specific conflict situations have Member States learned from previous health crises and from COVID-19?
- How can United Nations peace operations continue to deliver on their mandates in times of global health crises? How can they ensure adequate resources and capacities to protect the health and safety of all personnel? How can they pursue the full implementation of their mandates, including the protection of civilians?
- How can the Security Council best strengthen its conflict prevention efforts by taking into account the security implications of health risks?
- How can countries prevent the deterioration of human rights situations related to emergency measures?
- How can Member States better support the critical role of women in epidemic and pandemic response efforts?

### **Format of the meeting**

12. The meeting will be chaired by Heiko Maas, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Germany.

13. The following speakers have been invited to give briefings:

- António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (to be confirmed)
- Peter Maurer, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (to be confirmed)
- Amira Elfadil Mohammed Elfadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union (to be confirmed)

14. The working methods for the month of July have not yet been adopted. Not prejudging the decision by the members of the Security Council on these working methods, Germany intends to hold the open debate in the format of an open videoconference. Member States and observer States that are not members of the Security Council will, if following the same working methods applied in that month, be invited to participate in the open videoconference in accordance with the principles of rule 37 and can participate, following a decision, by submitting written statements. In such cases, they will be invited to send their written statements to the President of the Security Council ([dppa-scsb3@un.org](mailto:dppa-scsb3@un.org)) ahead of the meeting.

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