

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 12 February 2021 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

In its capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of February 2021, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland intends to organize a high-level open debate on the theme “Maintenance of international peace and security: implementation of resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#)”, to be held on Wednesday, 17 February 2021, at 8.30 a.m.

In order to guide the discussions on this topic, the United Kingdom has prepared a concept note (see annex).

Member States and observers wishing to participate are invited to submit a written statement of approximately 500 words to the Security Council Affairs Division (dppa-scsb3@un.org). Statements sent by 18 February 2021 will be included in a compilation document.

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

(Signed) Barbara **Woodward**



Annex to the letter dated 12 February 2021 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council open debate on ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in contexts affected by conflict and insecurity, to be held on 17 February 2021

Objective

1. The objective is to discuss the role of the Security Council, Member States and the United Nations in ensuring that vaccines against the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) are made available equitably in contexts affected by conflict and insecurity.

Context

Coronavirus disease

2. Global epidemiological trends show a pandemic on the rise, with the emergence of new, more transmissible variants driving increased transmission in most regions. The global economy is in crisis, and economic recovery is likely to be fragile and uneven, exacerbating drivers of conflict and instability. This has increased the urgency for targeted vaccine roll-out at speed and volume across the world, to help to end the acute phase of the pandemic.

3. In April 2020, the Secretary-General made it clear that, while the COVID-19 pandemic was a health crisis, its implications were far-reaching and threatened global peace and security.

Role of vaccines in ending the pandemic

4. Safe and effective vaccines will play a critical role in ending the pandemic. Successful vaccines will help to reduce the scale and duration of the pandemic and avert further economic, health and education costs and other drivers of instability.

5. The international community must work together to develop effective and affordable vaccines that can be made available for all. There are both moral and practical imperatives to making sure that no one is left behind by vaccination programmes. Until COVID-19 is under control everywhere in the world, we will not be able to restore international trade, travel, prosperity and security. Without collaboration, vaccine distribution will be uneven and risks exacerbating inequalities, conflicts and tensions.

Equitable access to vaccines in conflict and fragile contexts

6. There are particular challenges associated with facilitating safe and equitable access to vaccines in contexts affected by conflict and insecurity. More funding is needed to meet shortfalls in securing supplies and delivering vaccinations on the ground in complex environments. Operational challenges include logistics and managing vaccine storage, as well as securing comprehensive humanitarian access. Local ceasefires are likely to be essential to enable life-saving vaccinations to take place. Overcoming those challenges will require greater national, regional and international cooperation and solidarity, with the United Nations playing a key coordinating role.

7. Communication and engagement with communities will be vital to raise awareness of the disease and the vaccine, and to prevent misinformation provoking

insecurity, putting health-care workers at risk and hindering efforts to end the pandemic.

8. Routine vaccination campaigns have been either suspended or postponed because of COVID-19. The roll-out of COVID-19 vaccines should not displace existing vaccination programmes, including for measles and children under 5, and life-saving humanitarian action, including in famine contexts.

International efforts, including the role of the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility

9. While all Governments hold the primary responsibility for vaccinating their populations, including ensuring equitable access to vaccines, international support is needed to ensure that populations affected by conflict and insecurity are not left behind.

10. The COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility is a multilateral mechanism administered by the Global Vaccine Alliance (Gavi), the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and the World Health Organization that pools funding and risk within a portfolio of COVID-19 vaccines and ensures that manufacturing capacity is available to produce and deliver vaccines rapidly and at scale. The COVAX Advance Market Commitment is aimed at providing at least 1.3 billion doses of donor-funded vaccines to provide coverage for up to 20 per cent of high-risk populations in 92 countries in 2021.

11. To ensure that there are sufficient supplies of vaccines available for humanitarian deployments and other emergency situations, up to 5 per cent of the COVAX doses are reserved as part of a “humanitarian buffer”. The humanitarian buffer stock is a measure of last resort, for missed or neglected populations, for example refugees and asylum seekers. It should not be an alternative to State responsibility (through national deployment and vaccination plans) and should be deployed only where there is an unavoidable gap in coverage or when other options have been exhausted. It will be made available to implementing partners, humanitarian organizations and other relevant organizations that are the primary actors delivering vaccines in those contexts.

Role of the United Nations

12. On 1 July 2020, the Security Council adopted resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#) on fighting COVID-19 in the most vulnerable countries, with an emphasis on countries in need, including those in situations of armed conflict. The availability of approved vaccines now being delivered through COVAX means that it is appropriate and timely for the Security Council to consider the role of the United Nations in facilitating vaccine delivery in fragile and conflict-affected regions.

13. The United Nations system and the humanitarian partners of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee have a key role to play. The United Nations Children’s Fund is experienced in delivering immunization campaigns and is both leading the procurement of vaccines for the COVAX Advance Market Commitment and supporting developing countries in preparing for vaccine deployment as a member of the Gavi Alliance. The World Health Organization is leading the regulatory review and approval of vaccines that are included in the COVAX portfolio to ensure their safety and effectiveness. The World Health Organization also plays a role in planning and implementing immunization campaigns in humanitarian settings. Together with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the three organizations have developed a risk communication and community engagement approach for the COVID-19 response.

14. Following the call for a ceasefire in resolution [2532 \(2020\)](#), further action by the Security Council is now needed to call for further conflict pauses specifically to enable COVID-19 vaccinations to be carried out in areas affected by conflict. The Security Council must play its role in ensuring full access for humanitarian and medical personnel and their equipment, and calling for the protection of humanitarian and health-care workers.

Guiding questions

15. The guiding questions are as follows:

- (a) How can we ensure that people living in conflict and fragile settings receive safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines and are not left behind by national and international vaccination programmes?
- (b) How can we overcome the main barriers to vaccine delivery in highly unstable and conflict-affected settings, including the control of some areas by armed groups, logistical challenges, the flow of funds and the safety of health-care workers?
- (c) How can we ensure comprehensive access to vulnerable populations in conflict and fragile settings to deliver vaccines safely?
- (d) What role is there for the Security Council within a wider United Nations system approach to the problem?
- (e) How can we prevent misinformation from spreading and overcome vaccine hesitancy?
- (f) What can we learn from ongoing immunization campaigns in conflict settings, and ensure that those critical campaigns continue alongside COVID-19 vaccinations?

Format

16. The high-level open meeting will be chaired by the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, Dominic Raab. Interpretation will be provided in the six official languages of the United Nations.
