



# NGO NEWS

BY TERESA KOTTURAN SCN AUGUST 2020

## The Road Ahead: COVID-19 and the 2030 Agenda



### HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The United Nations held its annual High-Level Political Forum for the follow-up and review of Sustainable Development Goals virtually July 7–16. This year, 47 countries presented their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on how they have implemented the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Five years after its adoption, 2020 should have put the agenda on a new accelerated trajectory to achieve the transformative plan of action for people and planet. It was reflected in the theme: “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development.” But this year, the participants debated where they stood on the SDGs in the light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and reflected on how they can respond to the pandemic to get back on track to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Progress made during the past five years, though uneven, has been stalled or reversed with the impact of the pandemic. Food insecurity, deterioration of the natural environment, and persistent inequalities remain and have been exacerbated by the pandemic. According to the SDG Report 2020: “The poorest and the most vulnerable, including women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees and informal sector workers are being affected disproportionately by the pandemic. Similarly, vulnerable countries, including least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, small island devel-

oping states and countries in humanitarian or fragile situations, stand to be hit the hardest in the long term owing to the fragility of their health systems, the limited coverage of their social protection systems, limited financial and other resources, vulnerability to external shocks and excessive dependence on international trade.”

Here are some of the specific setbacks and problems we face:

- **The target to end global poverty by 2030 will not be met.** Poverty reduction has been slowing down even before the pandemic. Social protection is crucial for vulnerable people to face any kind of crisis. Since 55 percent of the world’s population do not benefit from any form of social protection, the pandemic is pushing 70–100 million people into extreme poverty.
- **World hunger has increased:** 270 million people are experiencing extreme food insecurity.
- During the past five years, immunization coverage had increased from 72–85 per cent. **Those gains are being eroded by the pandemic.** People are spending more than 10 percent of their income for out-of-pocket healthcare. This has pushed nearly 90 million persons into extreme poverty. Most healthcare systems in the world were inadequate to respond to the emergency

Continued on page 6

# How Has the UN Responded to COVID-19?

It is often asked, what is the United Nations doing? As the coronavirus pandemic is spreading like wildfire, infecting millions of people and taking away the lives of hundreds of thousands, it is worth asking: What is the UN doing? Global media highlighted the wrong moves and decisions of the World Health Organization, but hardly any reporting is done on the mobilization that the UN System has employed for a comprehensive global policy initiatives and operational response strategies. The entire UN system was mobilized behind the WHO-led health “response to distribute medical supplies, train health workers; build tracing and testing capacities; prevent spread of the virus among vulnerable populations, especially in camps, prisons and detention centers; disseminate information widely about prevention and containment measures; and support national response planning and decision-making.”

The “[United Nations Comprehensive Response to COVID-19: Saving Lives, Protecting Societies, Recovering Better](#)” is meant to:

- Deliver a global response that leaves no one behind
- Reduce our vulnerability to future pandemics
- Build resilience to future shocks—above all climate change
- Overcome the severe and systemic inequalities exposed by the pandemic.

The response promotes three pillars of operation:

- Delivery of a large-scale, coordinated and comprehensive health response
- Adoption of policies that address the devastating socioeconomic, humanitarian and human rights aspects of the crisis
- A recovery process that builds back better

As part of this response, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres issued a series of policy briefs to provide ideas to governments on how to address the consequences of this crisis. We all are aware that the COVID-19 pandemic is more than a health crisis, it is an economic crisis, a humanitarian crisis, a security crisis, and a human rights crisis. He has also used his convening power and advocacy to mobilize world leaders on critical issues such as cooperation

on vaccine, financing and debt relief. In his first appeal, Guterres called for a Global Ceasefire which was supported by 180 countries, armed movements, religious and faith leaders and more than 800 civil society organizations. To meet the global emergency, the prime ministers of Canada and Jamaica along with the UN Secretary-General convened world leaders and international organizations with representation from private sector and civil society, to launch a large-scale, coordinated, and comprehensive response.

On the issue of safeguarding lives and livelihoods, the UN has met the immediate health and humanitarian needs of the vulnerable in 63 countries and provided immediate relief packages for developing countries. Guterres has also urged all governments to make the prevention of violence against women – the other pandemic, a key part of their national response plans. Nearly one in five women worldwide has experienced violence in the past year. Over 140 governments supported this call. As the pandemic ravaged, the world also saw an increase in hate speech and the spread of misinformation. In this regard, the Secretary-General appealed to all for an end to hate speech and spread kindness. He specifically called on political leaders to show solidarity with all members of their societies and build social cohesion.

Right from the outset, the UN is paying special attention to those countries and groups with the least ability to cope with the virus and its repercussions. A series of policy briefs were issued to raise the profile of 63 countries, who are facing humanitarian or refugee crises or with high levels of vulnerability. The people of the move—the refugees and migrants, victims of trafficking, displaced persons fleeing persecution, war, violence and human rights violations have been disproportionately impacted of COVID-19. A policy brief on people on the move highlights the need to protect their human rights, humanitarian assistance and health and social services. (Other policy briefs on the impact of COVID-19 focus on women, children, solidarity, human rights, older persons, disability, hate and xenophobia, mental health, food security and nutrition and world of work.) Global solidarity in the response is not only a moral imperative, it is necessary in an interconnected and interdependent world, where “none of us is safe until all of us are safe.”





tor, and Susan Oxley, federation communications coordinator were present to provide an accountability report of our ministries. The meeting was opened with a prayer: "Another World is Possible," and a message from Sister Grace. Sister Teresa provided a highlight of her engagements at the United Nations from July 2019–June 2020. Each NGO Liaison reported, in a short and succinct manner, how their congregations have implemented the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was supplemented by written reports which were collated and shared with all.

The group had a discussion on racism, UN75 (issues around the 75th anniversary of the UN) and SDGs for future engagements of our membership.

The pandemic has pushed millions of people into new vulnerabilities and we have a moral/Gospel call to respond to the signs of the times.

## Connecting Virtually During COVID

### SC Federation NGO Liaison Meetings

In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown, while everyone was experiencing uncertainties, fears and deaths of friends and loved ones, in keeping with the times, the NGO Liaisons from the Sisters of Charity Federation congregations met virtually. We gathered April 24 to check in and share the impact of the pandemic on a personal and communal level and how our congregational ministries were responding at the local/national level. The sharing showed how similar some of our experiences were and how we were reaching out to the most vulnerable people. It was a life-giving experience, and a demonstration of our Charity charism. During this meeting, we also welcomed Sister Victoria Marie Gribschaw, SC, the new NGO Liaison for the Sisters of Charity of Seton Hill.



*Sister Victoria Marie Gribschaw, SC (Seton Hill)*

The cancellation of the annual Sisters of Charity Federation leadership meeting in May 2020 did not stop us from gathering virtually on June 30. Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN, SC Federation NGO representative to the UN, along with Sister Grace Hartzog, SC, federation executive direc-

*Photo IDs from top left: Sister Marion Sheridan, CSM; Susan Oxley, Debbie Webber (Cincinnati), Sister Victoria Marie Gribschaw, SC (Seton Hill); John Shively (Leavenworth), Sister Katherine McGrath, SC (Halifax), Sister Helene Allan, NDSC; Sister Carol De Angelo, SC (New York); Sister Bernice Steele, CSM; Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN; Sister Grace Hartzog, SC; Fr. Terry Moran (New Jersey), Sister Joetta Venneman, PBVM (Nazareth); Sister Mary Powers, DC; Sister Carol Wentworth, OLM; Sister Pat Poole, SCIC; and Sister Margaret Louise Brown, DC.*

### Justice Coalition for Religious – JCoR

A Reflection Day with an outside facilitator for the Steering Board Members to take stock of the first three years of JCoR's work and to envision the future on June 19. JCoR is engaged in capacity building for SDG advocacy in India, Eastern Africa and Latin America with funding from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation.



# WHO Manifesto for a Healthy Recovery from COVID-19

“The pandemic is a reminder of the intimate and delicate relationship between people and planet. Any efforts to make our world safer are doomed to fail unless they address the critical interface between people and pathogens, and the existential threat of climate change, that is making our Earth less habitable.” —  
*World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus*

There is no going back to way we were before. The world needs to be prepared for a transformative journey while focusing on its attempt to protect its people and recover. Policy decisions and financial stimulus injected into the economy can shape the way we live our lives, work and consume for years to come. Beyond the coronavirus pandemic we are faced with environmental degradation and pollution, greenhouse gas emissions driving up global warming and the climate crisis. Any attempt to quickly gain back all the economic and financial losses can further damage the ecological systems that sustain human health. The WHO Manifesto advocates for a healthier, fairer and a greener world. It is not a narrow health focused manifesto, but one that takes the totality of people and planet into consideration. The following are the Actionables for a healthy, green recovery:

## **1. Protect and preserve the source of human health: Nature**

- Biological Diversity – incorporate biodiversity values, ecosystem protection and the ‘value of nature’ into policies – at all levels.

## **Global Debt and COVID-19: Jubilee USA Debt Campaign**

The coronavirus crisis is pushing developing countries toward a debt crisis while reducing their capacity to fight the pandemic and poverty. In April 2020, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) announced \$500 million debt service cancellation for 25 poorest countries. The G20 suspension of debt in April was inadequate, for it failed to mandate any action from private creditors or multilateral development banks, like the World Bank. Seventy-three of the world’s poorest countries are eligible to join the Debt Service Suspension Initiative, and 41 countries have applied. This will

- Climate Change – reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- Air Pollution

## **2. Invest in essential services, from water and sanitation to clean energy in healthcare facilities:**

- Water – provide and promote the use of safe drinking water; ensure drinking water quality standards; protect drinking-water supplies
- Sanitation – access to safe toilets
- Hygiene
- Clean energy
- Healthy, safe and resilient work places

## **3. Ensure a quick healthy energy transition**

## **4. Promote healthy, sustainable food systems**

## **5. Build healthy, livable cities**

- Social inclusiveness and cohesion
- Clean air
- Access to adequate water, sanitation, hygiene, waste management and food
- Housing

## **6. Stop using taxpayer money to fund pollution**

- Stop subsidies on fossil fuels
- Subsidize or exempt tax on clean energy

We have been advocating, as well as incorporating these Actionables to change our lifestyles to protect people and planet. As we take steps to recover, there is urgency to act, there are no quick fixes or short cuts.

Read: [Actionables for a healthy recovery from COVID-19](#)

help them save \$9 billion.

The global economy is hit very hard by the pandemic and the poorest countries will not be able to free up enough cash to cope with the pandemic by the eight-month freeze on debt. Money saved on debt cancellation should not be used for servicing debt payments to private banks and bondholders. Research by Oxfam, Christian Aid and Global Justice Now show, “73 countries will still pay up to \$33.7 billion in debt payments through the end of the year, or \$2.8 billion per month. These countries also owe \$11.6 billion to private creditors and \$13.8 billion (or \$38 million a day) to multilateral institutions this year.”

Continued on page 7

# Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A New Social Contract for a New Era

*The 18th Nelson Mandela  
Lecture by the Secretary-  
General of the United Na-  
tions*

On Nelson Mandela International Day July 18, Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations delivered the Nelson Mandela Lecture virtually. By far, this is one of the strongest speeches he has delivered. The first few lines of his speech lay out the stark reality the world faces:

“COVID-19 is shining a spotlight on this injustice. The world is in turmoil. Economies are in freefall. We have been brought to our knees—by a microscopic virus. The pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of our world. It has laid bare risks we have ignored for decades: inadequate health systems; gaps in social protection; structural inequalities; environmental degradation; the climate crisis... The virus poses the greatest risk to the most vulnerable: those living in poverty, older people, and people with disabilities and pre-existing conditions.”

In a few deft sentences, he exposed the fallacies the world holds on to:

“COVID-19 has been likened to an x-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built. It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere:

- The lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all;
- The fiction that unpaid care work is not work;
- The delusion that we live in a post-racist world;
- The myth that we are all in the same boat.

Because while we are all floating on the same sea, it's clear that some are in superyachts while others are



clinging to drifting debris.”

We all are aware of the growing inequalities within countries and between countries, and during the pandemic the gap has widened further. More than 70 percent of the world's people are living with rising income and wealth inequality. According to Guterres, wealth and income inequalities are compounded by “gender,

family and ethnic background, race, disability and other factors; and multiple inequalities intersect and reinforce each other across generations.’ Inequality is on the way of human development; it manifests in ‘discrimination, abuse and lack of access to justice, particularly for indigenous people, migrants, refugees and minorities. Inequalities are a direct assault on human rights.” Hence, addressing inequality is driving force throughout for social justice.

He spoke of the millions of people being left behind, the prevalence of gender inequality and gender violence women face, structural racism and systemic injustices, etc., and how colonialism and patriarchy have contributed to inequality in the world. He emphasized that COVID-19 is “an opportunity to build back a more equal and sustainable world... which should be based on a New Social Contract and a New Global Deal that create equal opportunities for all and respect the rights and freedoms of all.”

Any attempt to summarize the lecture will deprive you of the full message. Please listen to the video or read from the links given below.

**18th Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture: Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A New Social Contract for a New Era**

- [Watch video](#) on UN WebTV
- [Read](#) (view/download PDF document)



# The Road Ahead *continued from page 1*



[Watch on YouTube:](#) *Opening of the 2020 High-Level-Political Forum on Sustainable Development*

ing water, including 785 million without even basic drinking water, and 42.2 billion without sagely managed sanitation. The consequences of not having adequate water and soap for hand-washing during the pandemic are disastrous. Water availability is essential for homeless people and those living in temporary settlements. Water connections of people living in poverty are being disconnected for lack of

payment. Governments and cities need to think of water supply beyond household level.

- created by the pandemic. The health impact of the pandemic has predominantly fallen on already marginalized and vulnerable communities around the world, including indigenous populations.
- **Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, remain unrealized.** The pandemic has affected women and girls disproportionately. Globally, women make up 70 percent of all healthcare professionals. Women spend three times as many hours as men on unpaid care. Living in confined spaces during the lockdown, women and girls risk infection. During the lockdown, they are forced to remain with their abusers and are subjected to a pandemic of violence in the home.
- **At the end of 2019, 263 million children were out of school and 773 million adults, two-thirds of them women, remained illiterate.** Lockdown during the pandemic forced 1.8 billion children out of schools, derailing their education. Millions of children lack access to electricity, computers and Internet to continue their online education. Extreme poverty will force many children to drop out of school permanently, and many will end up in child marriage.
- **The water and sanitation crisis is getting worse.** One-third of the world population is experiencing water distress now. More than 2 billion persons have no access to safely managed drinking water, including 785 million without even basic drinking water, and 42.2 billion without sagely managed sanitation. The consequences of not having adequate water and soap for hand-washing during the pandemic are disastrous. Water availability is essential for homeless people and those living in temporary settlements. Water connections of people living in poverty are being disconnected for lack of payment. Governments and cities need to think of water supply beyond household level.
- **Before the pandemic, the global economy was growing at a slower rate. The current crisis has abruptly and profoundly disrupted it, pushing the world into a recession.** This shock has resulted in the loss of 400 million full-time jobs. Globally, 61 percent of workers are in the informal sector, and the current crisis has affected 1.6 billion workers, (half of the global workforce.) Their incomes will fall by 60 percent. The youth of today have been adversely affected—one in six youth have lost their jobs and they are called the “locked down generation.” In 2019, 22 percent of the world’s young were not in employment, education or training.
- **Inequalities continue to persist between countries and within countries.** In some countries, the bottom 40 percent did experience growth in their incomes. But according to the SDG Report, in all countries, the bottom 40 percent of the population received less than 25 percent of the overall income or consumption, while the top 10 percent received at least 20 percent. As millions of people lost their jobs or closed their businesses, American billionaires became richer by \$565 billion. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and deepened existing inequalities.
- **Currently, 80 million people worldwide are ref-**

Continued on page 7

## The Road Ahead *continued from page 6*

ugees, asylum seekers or internally displaced, fleeing wars, conflicts or persecutions.

- According to the latest report by the International Labor Office, 40.3 million victims of trafficking are trapped in modern-day slavery.

Seventy-one percent of trafficking victims are women and girls, and 29 percent are men and boys. Twenty-one percent of victims of sexual exploitation are children.

As the world recovers from the pandemic, we should ask “What kind of post COVID-19 world do we want?” This is our moment to build back better, smarter and green.

Let us demand of our governments to move out of national isolation tactics and to address the unprecedented health, social and economic crisis with global cooperation from a long-term perspective. We live in an inherently interconnected world, and partnerships are needed for charting a transformative recovery plan that will not leave anyone behind. The same urgency with which governments responded to the crisis with

## Global Debt *continued from page 4*

Ahead of the G20 Finance Ministers meeting from July 18–19, Jubilee USA submitted letters signed by 213 organizations to G20, IMF and White House, requesting more action to confront the global health and economic impacts of coronavirus. (Many SC Federation member organizations had signed on to these letters.) The letter recommended “expanded debt relief, especially extend the debt suspension initiative into 2021, more aid for developing countries, processes to curb tax evasion and corruption and enacting market and financial crisis protections.” Countries urgently need money to provide universal healthcare for all and cash transfers to people who have lost their livelihoods and are falling into extreme poverty and experiencing hunger and food insecurity.

The G20 Finance Ministers failed to live up to the expectations of the debt burdened countries and all those who advocated on their behalf. Their focus on the global health and economic impacts of the coronavirus produced only words: “determined to use, all available policy tools to safeguard people’s lives, jobs and incomes, support global economic recovery...”

stimulus plans should be directed to address climate change, universal health care, quality education, women empowerment and gender equality, adequate housing, water and sanitation, good governance, fight against poverty, hunger and structural inequalities.

We have a window of opportunity to re-imagine our world, to find transformative pathways. We cannot go back to business as usual. We need to create innovative solutions and act together in solidarity to address structural injustices and work for systemic change. Let us harness the wave of compassion unleashed by people everywhere in the face of fear and death, and use our resources proactively to protect vulnerable people and our planet. Recovery has to be equitable, resilient and sustainable, to provide dignity for all. We need to raise our ambition and accelerate action on the 2030 Agenda. According to the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, “The 2030 Agenda is our roadmap and the goals and targets are the tools to get there.” This agenda requires political will, a whole of government, a whole of society partnerships. We need a human development initiative that is compatible to environmental protection. And “We the People...” can and should make a difference.

Decisions on further debt payment suspensions, permanent reductions on debt and aid to poorer countries will be taken later in the year. Though they saw the need for the private sector to participate in the debt payment relief initiatives, no steps were taken to compel the private creditors to participate. Inaction by G20 countries leaves the developing countries to shoulder the burden by themselves, which could force them to borrow from the international financial markets to meet the current crisis. More debt will increase the vulnerabilities of people. This road will not lead to a ‘New Normal,’ but to ‘business as usual.’ And advocacy by Faith-Based organizations will have to continue along with prayers.



Sister Teresa Kotturan, SCN  
NGO Representative  
747 Third Avenue, Second Floor # 213  
New York, NY 10017  
scfederationunngo@gmail.com  
facebook.com/ngoscfederation  
@ngoscfederation  
[sistersofcharityfederation.org/ngo](https://sistersofcharityfederation.org/ngo)  
Vincentian Family: [famvin.org](https://famvin.org)