

# Update on the Secretary-General's Appeal for a **Global Ceasefire**

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## Update on the Secretary-General's Appeal for a Global Ceasefire

This note provides an update on the responses to my appeal for a Global Ceasefire of 23 March 2020. It documents the broad international support with which this appeal has been greeted, the response by conflict parties in a number of situations of armed conflict and the efforts on the ground by United Nations representatives and other actors to press forward and try to consolidate fragile advances towards laying down weapons. While I am pleased to be able to report on these positive signals, they come with a note of caution: it will take time and sustained diplomatic engagement to agree and then maintain ceasefires in settings of deep mistrust. Underscoring the urgency of our efforts to do so is our shared imperative, at this time of global crisis, to stop the fighting everywhere – now.

— Secretary-General António Guterres

### I. IMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 ON INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

1. The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest test the world has faced since the formation of the United Nations. It is a global health crisis that is killing people and spreading human suffering. It has and will have profound social, economic and political consequences, including relating to international peace and security.
2. As detailed in my report of 31 March on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, the crisis brought on by the pandemic “risks reversing decades of progress in the fight against poverty and exacerbating already high levels of inequality within and between countries”.<sup>1</sup> The postponement of elections or limitations on the ability to vote, sustained restrictions on movement and access to food and other resources, as well as spiraling unemployment and discontent over the capacity of public institutions to

respond, may all increase political tensions. In conflict settings, the uncertainty created by the spread of the pandemic may create incentives for some actors to press their advantage, potentially leading to an increase of violence. Terrorist groups in particular may see opportunities to strike as the attention of governments and the international community is absorbed by the health crisis. COVID-19 also risks diverting international attention and resources away from conflict prevention and mediation, when diplomatic engagement is needed most.

3. More immediately, the pandemic has the potential to devastate fragile and conflict-affected states, overwhelming already weak and faltering health systems and assailing the most vulnerable: those caught up in conflicts, refugees and others forcibly displaced by violence and persecution. As set out in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan to COVID-19, the lack of adequate health systems and governance structures, combined with poor basic service in countries already facing humanitarian crisis, will severely constrain these states’

<sup>1</sup> United Nations: Shared Responsibility; Global Solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 (31 March 2020; p1).

ability to prevent the spread of the pandemic and provide sufficient health care to infected people as well as to sustain health services.<sup>2</sup> Women and children in fragile settings are particularly likely to face obstacles accessing health care, livelihoods/education and other critical support. Meanwhile, their needs for protection – including in relation to domestic and gender-based violence – may increase with the imposition of much needed social distancing measures and movement restrictions.

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## II. APPEAL FOR A GLOBAL CEASEFIRE

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4. The severity of the crisis we face in the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the tragedy and folly of the ongoing suffering caused by armed conflict. On 23 March 2020, I accordingly launched an appeal for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world, urging all warring parties to pull back from hostilities, to put aside mistrust and animosity and to silence their guns as a means to help create conditions for the delivery of aid, to open up space for diplomacy, and bring hope to places among the most vulnerable to COVID-19.
5. This appeal for a global ceasefire rests on my belief that the urgency and tragedy of the current moment warrants confidence-building measures between conflict parties to alter their calculations about the benefits of continued fighting. It is a call for conflict parties to end the scourge of war and fight the virus ravaging our world instead, and for the international

community – necessarily focused on our joint battle against the pandemic – to recognize such entry points as they emerge and prioritize efforts to bring armed conflicts to an end.

6. Countries and populations devastated by years of war need our support. Stopping the fighting will allow those places where coping mechanisms are already at a breaking point to better prepare themselves for what might be coming. Foremost in our attention must be those who are paying the highest price, including women, children, people with disabilities, the marginalized and the displaced.

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## III. GLOBAL RESPONSE

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7. I have been greatly encouraged by the multiple expressions of support my call for a global ceasefire has received, from several world leaders and governments, regional organizations, non-state armed actors and others across the world, including all UN messengers of peace and many actors directly engaged in conflict resolution efforts. I am also heartened by the activism of civil society coalitions, platforms and organizations in lobbying governments and amplifying the appeal for a global ceasefire.
8. On 30 March, Pope Francis joined the appeal for a global ceasefire by urging an end to “any form of hostility, promoting the creation of humanitarian aid routes, openness to diplomacy, and attentiveness to those who find themselves in situations of grave vulnerability.” The Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, a member of my High-Level Advisory Board on

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<sup>2</sup> Global Humanitarian Response Plan: COVID-19 (April – December 2020; p10).

Mediation, also expressed his support. Across the world, we have seen communities of faith from all backgrounds galvanize to join the fight against a virus that knows no nationality, boundaries, ethnicity or faith.

9. In the context of the African Union's commitment to addressing root causes of conflicts to silence the guns and wars in Africa by 2020, on 27 March, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, appealed to "the moral and humanitarian obligation for all warring parties to immediately stop fighting to facilitate the measures being taken by Member States and other actors to combat and defeat the corona virus pandemic". Mr. Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, also publicly expressed support for my appeal. Meanwhile, the Chairmanship-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Secretary-General Thomas Greminger and the Heads of OSCE institutions joined my call for a global ceasefire in a letter addressed to the OSCE community.
10. Among other expressions of support, and given the importance of understanding and incorporating the gendered dimensions of the global ceasefire, its implications for children, and for the protection of civilians, I particularly welcome the endorsement of my appeal on 31 March by 54 Member States on behalf of their governments and as members of the Groups of Friends of Women, Peace and Security; Children and Armed Conflict; and/or Protection of Civilians.
11. Yet the challenges we face in moving from my appeal to its implementation are considerable. Long lasting conflicts, often with multiple

armed actors involved and deeply entwined with complex interests at the local, national and international level, defy easy solutions. Some conflict parties remain deeply invested in fighting, indifferent to the suffering of their populations. Spoilers may undermine ceasefire efforts or use this moment of international crisis to escalate tension. Sustained engagement and diplomatic pressure will be needed to deliver on the possibilities opened up by the global call.

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## IV. IMPACT ON THE GROUND

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12. In furtherance of my appeal, my representatives in the field – with full support from Headquarters and, whenever required, my personal support – as well other mediation actors, are engaging with conflict parties to help move towards ceasefires on the ground as a necessary prerequisite to lasting peace. While it is too early to assess the true impact of the appeal, there are signs that it is resonating across the world, albeit with uneven implementation. In a number of situations, former adversaries have taken courageous steps to declare an end to violence and fight the pandemic. Gestures of international solidarity have created important, albeit fragile, opportunities for continued dialogue, de-escalation and conflict resolution. However, in each context much work lies ahead.

### AFRICA

13. In the spirit of international cooperation, some African governments have called for national unity in response to the pandemic, including in The Gambia, Sierra Leone and Togo. Notably, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger formally endorsed the

global ceasefire appeal and reiterated their commitment to work jointly with the international community on implementation.

14. In Sudan, a unilateral cessation of hostilities has been announced by the government and most of the armed movements. While raising concerns about the security and humanitarian conditions in Darfur, particularly in the Jebel Marra region, the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid (SLA/AW) has agreed to a *de-facto* ceasefire. Similarly, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North/Abdelaziz Al-Hilu declared an extension of the unilateral cessation of hostilities to parts of the Two Areas under their control for an additional three months, except for self-defense purposes. Earlier, on 21 October 2019, the transitional government and the coalition of the Sudanese armed groups, the Sudan Revolutionary Forces (SRF), signed a ceasefire agreement for the duration of the peace talks launched in Juba on 9 September, which continues to date. UNAMID, together with the UN Country Team, provides support for the talks, which has resulted in several agreements, including on a cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access in the Two Areas of Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan States. The AU/UN Joint Special Representative has continued to impress the importance of adherence to the global ceasefire and urged holdouts to join the peace process.
15. Meanwhile, in South Sudan, the issuance of my global appeal bolstered efforts to uphold the existing arrangement on Cessation of Hostilities agreed by the warring parties, which created the minimum conditions for the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity on 22 February. While the implementation of the peace agreement is yet to be fully realized, my Special Representative continues to meet the parties in order to advance progress and impress on them the criticality of sustaining the ceasefire. Concurrently, we must not lose sight of complementary efforts to bring the non-signatory parties to the Agreement to endorse it fully, which is currently being facilitated by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), with the support of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and other partners.
16. In the Central African Republic on 25 March, my Special Representative called for a national ceasefire and on the signatories of the Peace Agreement to respect their commitment to put an end to all fighting. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) subsequently engaged with armed groups and the national implementing mechanism of the Peace Agreement to ensure effective ownership of the global ceasefire call by all its signatories.
17. In Cameroon, the Southern Cameroons Defence Forces, an armed wing of the African People's Liberation Movement, announced a temporary ceasefire on 25 March following my appeal for a global ceasefire. I called on other groups to follow suit. I also encouraged renewed dialogue to end the violence and human suffering, and reiterated the readiness of the United Nations to assist the authorities and the people of Cameroon in this regard.
18. On 18 and 21 March respectively, the Government of Libya (Government of National Accord) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) under the command of General Khalifa Haftar welcomed the calls by the United Nations and international community to stop the fighting, in the hope that

this would allow humanitarian access throughout the crisis-torn country and head off the potential threat of COVID-19. Despite this positive development, respect for the humanitarian pause was short-lived, with clashes between GNA and LNA forces escalating drastically on all frontlines in the next days. Exchanges of heavy-artillery fire continued in the Tripoli area, as well as in the Abu Grein area (west of Sirte), Zuwara (west of Tripoli) and Gharyan (south of Tripoli). This military escalation obstructed efforts by civilian authorities and the population to effectively respond to COVID-19. Given the already dire humanitarian situation in Libya and the possible impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the parties must seek to join forces to address the threat and to ensure unhindered access of humanitarian aid throughout the country. UNSMIL has continued to engage closely with international partners to sustain the momentum created by the 19 January Berlin Conference on Libya despite COVID-19. A virtual meeting of the International Follow-up Committee on Libya took place on 2 April.

## ASIA

19. My appeal for a global ceasefire has supported peace efforts in Afghanistan, where a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire is envisaged to be part of the agenda of Intra-Afghan negotiations under the 29 February 2020 agreement between the United States and the Taliban and the Joint Declaration between the United States and Afghanistan. The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has reiterated my appeal for a global ceasefire and emphasized that the best way to protect civilians and to address the evolving health crisis around COVID-19 is to stop the fighting altogether. On 31 March, the Security Council also urged Afghanistan's warring parties to comply with the global call for an immediate ceasefire to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure delivery of humanitarian aid throughout the country at this defining moment. The European Union Special Envoy and the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also issued statements on Afghanistan, as did the Islamic Republic of Iran, urging a ceasefire and the beginning of negotiations.
20. While fighting increased, on 26 March, the Government of Afghanistan announced a 21-member negotiating team, which includes five women. The Government and the Taliban have established technical contacts (partly through digital means) for an initial prisoner release, and a Taliban team arrived in Kabul on 31 March to advance the process. However, the last few weeks have seen the levels of conflict related violence in Afghanistan return to those which preceded the 22 to 29 February reduction in violence period, driven by Taliban attacks against the Afghan national defense and security forces.
21. On Myanmar, my Special Envoy appealed to relevant stakeholders, including government leaders, for ceasefires in areas affected by conflict, especially in Rakhine and Chin states where hundreds of civilians have reportedly been killed or injured and tens of thousands displaced from their homes due to stepped up clashes between the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army. While stating it respected proposals for a ceasefire, the Tatmadaw (Myanmar Defence Services) pronounced this was "not realistic" citing that fighting had continued despite its previous calls for a unilateral ceasefire in some ethnic areas. I urge all sides to seize a unique opportunity to build greater national

unity during the election period. Humanitarian actors, including the United Nations and partners, require greater access to people in need in conflict affected rural areas, including in Rakhine, Kachin, and northern Shan states, as well as the South East region. Especially in many of these peripheral areas, there is a shared interest in effectively addressing COVID-19. The Government of Myanmar has stated that it will step up efforts to provide humanitarian assistance and to grant enhanced access to international partners in Rakhine State. Additionally, several ethnic armed organizations have called for a halt in fighting and for medical assistance. On 1 April, the 'Brotherhood Alliance' extended their unilateral ceasefire until 30 April 2020.

22. On 16 March, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines announced a unilateral ceasefire, effective from 19 March through 15 April to facilitate the COVID-19 response, with the Communist Party of the Philippines, including its armed wing, the New People's Army, and political wing, the National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). On 24 March, Jose Maria Sison, the leader of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) announced that the CPP had declared a ceasefire in response to my appeal. An array of mediation actors including Norway, which has been facilitating peace talks between the Government and the NDFP since 2001, has encouraged conflict parties to respond positively to the global ceasefire appeal in the country.

## EUROPE

23. On 24 March, the Foreign Minister of Ukraine voiced his support for the call for a global ceasefire. On the same day, the entities in control of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk

regions of Ukraine also welcomed my appeal. On 27 March, the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine and the Trilateral Contact Group called on the parties to respond to the global ceasefire appeal. This was also echoed in a 30 March joint statement on Ukraine by the French and German Foreign Ministers. Nonetheless, despite the call, ceasefire violations have continued, as reported by the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission. This follows the largest increase in civilian casualties reported in March in the conflict zone, since September 2019. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, prior to 24 March, 50 civilians were wounded, and one was killed.

24. While there has been no active fighting in Cyprus for many years, my Special Representative widely disseminated my call for a global ceasefire, including formally to the leaders, underlining its relevance as the challenges related to the outbreak of COVID-19 have been a powerful reminder of the *de-facto* division of the island. Positively, channels of communication including at the highest level between the leaders of the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities remain open. The pandemic should offer the potential of an added incentive to find a solution to the Cyprus issue, as a united Cyprus would be better prepared to tackle the current crisis, as well as any future possible challenges.

## THE MIDDLE EAST

25. My Special Envoy for Syria appealed for a "complete and immediate" nationwide ceasefire in the country on 24 March, in line with Security Council resolution 2254 (2015), to allow for an all-out-effort against COVID-19. The first deaths

have already been reported in Syria which could herald a disaster for a country wracked by ten years of war, particularly for internally displaced persons. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) released a statement on the same day expressing support and the Syrian Opposition Coalition welcomed the appeal for a ceasefire. To implement the ceasefire and ensure that Syrians in all parts of the country have access to the equipment and resources needed to combat the virus, my Special Envoy has emphasized his readiness to work with all relevant actors on the ground and in the international community. He is engaging continuously with all stakeholders, and aiming to re-start diplomacy about a nationwide ceasefire.

26. On the ground, the Idlib ceasefire agreed between Russia and Turkey on 5 March continues to hold, with a halt in airstrikes and ground incursions. Mutual shelling has occurred since, but at significantly reduced levels compared to the situation prior to 5 March. However, the current relative calm appears fragile. In northern Syria, isolated exchanges of fire have also been reported between Turkish-backed armed opposition forces and the SDF, though there has been no escalation in the level of violence, which remains low. The situation in the Golan Heights, in UNDOF's area of operations, remains calm. The ceasefire generally continues to hold, although I remain concerned about reports of continuing violations. We continue to press both sides to refrain from any actions that would undermine the ceasefire agreement.
27. In Yemen, the Government and Ansar Allah welcomed the global ceasefire and expressed their willingness to engage with the United Nations to stop the fighting and foster joint efforts to

counter COVID19. The global ceasefire was also welcomed by the Southern Transitional Council and other Yemeni political and tribal groups including: the Southern People's Assembly, the Inclusive Hadramout Conference, the Hadramout Tribal Alliance, the General Council of Al-Mahra and Socotra, the National Alliance of Political Parties and Forces, the Federal Civil State Alliance, and the National Resistance Forces. Further, the Joint Forces Command endorsed and supported the decision of the Government and expressed their support for the efforts of the Special Envoy. Yemeni civil society also came out strongly in support of stopping the fighting and making joint efforts to counter COVID19. Those groups included: the Feminist Solidary Network, Taiz Women for Life, the Abductees Mothers Association, the Southern Women for Peace and the Yemen Youth Forum for Peace.

28. Regrettably, despite the Government and Ansar Allah announcing their acceptance of the global appeal, the conflict has escalated following drones and ballistic missiles fired by the Ansar Allah towards Saudi Arabia, including its capital, Riyadh. Subsequently, the Saudi-led Coalition conducted multiple airstrikes in northern Yemen, including in Sana'a and Hudaydah. My Special Envoy for Yemen is working on preparations to convene the parties to discuss COVID-19 crisis management and nationwide ceasefire mechanisms and any other assistance that might be requested by the parties. The United Nations Mission to Support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA) is working in close coordination with my Special Envoy. The Head of UNMHA and Chair of the Redeployment Coordination Committee continues to stress that aerial strikes hamper the peace process and jeopardize the implementation of the

Hudaydah Agreement. The parties must continue working jointly through the Redeployment Coordination Committee and the Ceasefire Enhancement and De-escalation Mechanism to ensure that the ceasefire is fully respected, and de-escalation is sustained on the ground.

29. The situation in Iraq remains fragile. Prime Minister-designate Adnan al-Zurfi recently announced that Iraq will play a serious role in defusing geopolitical tensions in the region; highlighting the devastating humanitarian implications of COVID-19, he called on the international community to provide support. In follow up to my appeal, my Special Representative continues to engage with all political actors, while impressing upon them the importance of the rapid formation of a national government to steer efforts. The call by Moqtada al Sadr amidst the COVID-19 outbreak for a cessation of all sectarian violence in Iraq as well as an end to wars in Syria, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere, is significant. He joins other Iraqi leaders calling for domestic and international unity to combat the disease.
30. While there were no public statements in either Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OpT) in support of the global call, the Gaza ceasefire, reached before the COVID-19 outbreak in the area, appears to be holding. Cooperation between Israel and the Palestinian Authority and indirectly, Hamas in Gaza, reached unprecedented levels in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. The Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) is coordinating closely with all sides, setting up coordination structures and maintaining regular contact.

## THE AMERICAS

31. My appeal for a global ceasefire was welcomed by a range of political actors in the Americas. In Colombia many civil society representatives, fearing that ongoing hostilities in the country's conflict-affected regions left the population at increased risk, joined my call, which echoed appeals they had voiced during the advancing pandemic. My Special Representative and head of the United Nations Verification Mission continues to engage with national actors to reinforce the global appeal; it was also supported by representatives of the Catholic Church and the international community.
32. On 29 March, the National Liberation Army (ELN) announced a one-month unilateral ceasefire which began on 1 April. It described it as a "humanitarian gesture" taken in response to my global ceasefire appeal and those of Colombian actors. The decision of the ELN is an encouraging one which can bring a measure of relief to conflict-affected regions of Colombia by helping the authorities to focus on fighting the pandemic. The announcement has been positively received by a wide array of stakeholders, including members of the Peace Commissions of Congress, and by representatives of the international community, among them the Governments of Cuba and Norway, who have served as guarantors in talks with the ELN, and the representatives of the European Union and the Organization of American States. The Colombian Government, through its Peace Commissioner, has referred to the ELN's decision as a welcome gesture, while expressing the view that a one-month ceasefire is insufficient given the likely duration of the pandemic.

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## V. A CALL TO ACTION: TOWARDS LASTING PEACE

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33. In this time of crisis, it is essential and urgent that we build on positive developments, even if the steps are tentative and the gains fragile and easily reversible. I welcome indications that in a number of countries adversaries are exploring collaboration to address the pandemic. My Special Representatives and Special Envoys, as well as, where appropriate, Resident Coordinators will strive to bring parties to the conflict together to move from good intentions to reality. We are not there yet and we shall not get there without the active engagement of all our partners. I reiterate my call for a global ceasefire and urge all Member States, as well as our partners in regional organizations and civil society across the globe to help us achieve it.
34. The United Nations will continue its efforts to secure and support ceasefires globally, in the context of our broader work towards sustaining peace and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. In doing so, we will strive to strengthen partnerships across the board – with Member States, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations as well as other civil society actors, including religious leaders and women’s and youth organizations. Together with my Special Representatives, Envoys, senior officials at Headquarters, as well as the members of my High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation, I shall continue to closely examine the possibilities for diplomatic engagement in each instance, as well as continuing to encourage Member States, regional organizations and civil society partners with access and influence in relevant countries to act in support
- of my global call. During this time, the tools that we have developed over the years, including through mediation support, remain available not only to UN actors, but to Member States, regional organizations and other partners.
35. While COVID-19 has made it extremely challenging to convene conflict parties in direct talks, it will not deter the United Nations from pursuing political solutions. We must be creative and shall use digital tools to the maximum extent possible to open and maintain channels of communication and to de-escalate crises. This is already happening in many places, and the use of these tools will only accelerate. As we face this common threat, goodwill gestures between old adversaries may help create windows of opportunity to break deadlocks, but they need to be supported by pro-active diplomatic engagement and action. We must also continue to bring in the voices of other actors, including civil society and above all women and youth, in our efforts to secure sustainable agreements to uphold international peace and security.
36. The COVID-19 outbreak has underscored the imperative of stopping the fighting across the world. Many have heard and some answered my global appeal for a ceasefire. Many, among them both state and non-state actors, are perhaps still weighing up their options. We do not have much time. COVID-19 has shown how swiftly it can move across borders and devastate countries and bring life to a standstill. At this critical moment, I reiterate my appeal to armed actors around the world to put down their arms. Together, we must work to build more peaceful, resilient and prosperous societies.