



COVID-19 Recovery: Building Back Better¹

Seventy-five years ago, the world was in a deep crisis after the devastation of World War II. Negotiations between governments began that resulted in the founding of the United Nations in 1945 and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Common efforts to fight poverty and illiteracy, protect human rights, strengthen cooperation and maintain peace have been steps towards a vision of the world “free from fear, free from want” imagined in the UN Charter.

In 2020, the international community honors the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. We embarked on a Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals to accelerate sustainable solutions to the world’s biggest challenges. However, we now live in a world struggling to address the coronavirus pandemic which has dramatically affected political, economic and social life across the globe.

During a crisis, global cooperation and solidarity are urgently needed, but nationalism, racism, intolerance, xenophobia and border closures have too often prevailed. Measures to fight the pandemic have led to restrictions of long-established civic rights and democratic structures. An effective global response will require building consensus and strengthening concerted action to mitigate the multiple challenges we all face.

The pandemic is casting a shadow on hopes for sustainable development, achievements in the status of women, and other human and environmental concerns. The impacts of the virus magnify existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, making us painfully aware of gaps in social protection systems. Before COVID-19, over one billion people were without access to basic human needs, and 700 million were living in extreme poverty, mostly women and children. In many countries, health and social protection systems are inadequate, revealed by the lack of

¹ This civil society statement “COVID-19 Recovery: Building Back Better” was initiated, drafted and concluded by leaders of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CoNGO) based in Vienna, Austria, together with the chairs of CoNGO substantive NGO committees operating there. This statement follows and reinforces the October 2019 CoNGO Declaration on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. Endorsement of this statement by NGOs accredited within the UN system is now open. To endorse, email Liberato Bautista, CoNGO President, at president@ngocongo.org. For more information about the background of the statement, email Martina Gredler, CoNGO Second Vice President, svp@ngocongo.org.

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provisions to protect and test medical staff and treat the infected. Older persons are particularly vulnerable to the disease and face increased discrimination.

The pandemic has led to significant restrictions on people's freedom of movement and peaceful assembly; the misuse of emergency measures may further erode human rights. We have seen authoritarian forces seize the opportunity to expand their power, which has adverse impacts on civic space and the ability of communities and individuals to exercise their rights. The prospects of a long-term global recession raise serious concerns over how long and to what extent restrictions will be in force. After the public health crisis recedes, we must ensure that measures curtailing civil liberties are fully lifted to protect democratic institutions and citizen participation.

We representatives of international NGOs in consultative relationship with the UN fear that while attention is focused on the global health crisis, efforts to address the ongoing climate crisis, achieve sustainable development and gender equality, protect human rights and promote peace are being neglected.

We continue to work in partnerships to develop a global plan of action to address the multiple challenges we all face, while promoting human rights, democracy, climate action, gender equality, justice, peace and security, and sustainable development.

We are determined to emerge from this crisis and build a better world for all.

We call on the 193 UN Member States to renew their commitment to the UN and to turn this international crisis into an opportunity, using it as a starting point to rebuild economies that are inclusive, and based on sustainable production and consumption:

- to accelerate climate action by rebuilding economies, transport and industries in a carbon neutral manner;
- to recognize and address the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on women, children, older persons, and other vulnerable and marginalized groups;
- to change the militarized discourse of war and threat to one of care and solidarity, within countries as well as between Member States;
- to provide universal access to and funding for health and social protections for all people;
- to reallocate military spending and increase investments in meeting human needs to create a healthier and more peaceful planet and achieve Agenda 2030;
- to support non-governmental community organizations, human rights defenders and women's groups, and include them in national and global recovery and reconstruction efforts;
- to strengthen the UN System and provide the necessary funding to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and ensure inclusive societies and economies, a sustainable environment and a more peaceful world.

Only if we continue to work in partnerships and promote human rights, democracy, rule of law, climate action, gender equality, sustainable development, peace and security, can we emerge from this crisis and build a better world for all.

**Vienna, Austria
12 May 2020**

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Endorsements as of 21 May 2020

(To endorse, please email president@ngocongo.org)

AFEW International
Agrenska Foundation
African Action on Aids
Amman Center for Human Rights Studies
Arab Society for Academic Freedom
Dianova International
Dominicans for Justice and Peace
Election Network in the Arab Region
Environment Liaison Centre International
European Federation of Older Students at Universities
Federation of American Women's Clubs Association (FAWCO)
Fundacion Global Democracia y Desarrollo
Fundacion para Estudio e Investigacion de la Mujer
Global Foundation for Democracy and Development
Graduate Women International
International Alliance of Women
International Association of Applied Psychology
International Association of Democratic Lawyers
International Council of Psychologists
International Council of Women
International Federation for Home Economics
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Society for International Development – Vienna Chapter
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Universal Esperanto Association
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Women's Federation for World Peace international
World Student Christian Federation
World Union for Progressive Judaism
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