

COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

Amnesty International is calling on G20 Finance Ministers to demonstrate global leadership by adopting bold plans at their meeting on 18-19 July 2020 for international cooperation and assistance to support the poorest states in implementing a just recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic that ensures that no one will be left behind. We need to build a better future for all.

EXPANDING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

There are many global initiatives that have estimated the amount of money that needs to be mobilized to mount an effective response to COVID-19. The UN has launched a US\$2 billion global [humanitarian response plan](#) “to fight COVID-19 in some of the world’s most vulnerable countries”. The [Global Preparedness Monitoring Board](#) (an independent body co-convened by the WHO and World Bank Group) estimates that “a minimum of US\$8bn of new funding is required immediately to address the most urgent threats posed by COVID-19”. UNCTAD has called for a “\$2.5 trillion coronavirus crisis package for developing countries”, and in his report on the [socio-economic impacts of COVID-19](#), the UN Secretary-General estimated that “A large-scale, coordinated and comprehensive multilateral response amounting to at least 10 per cent of global GDP” is needed. These estimates are likely to increase as the pandemic spreads and its impacts are felt more severely.

The vast majority of states, including 17 G20 members,¹ are party to human rights treaties that include the obligation of international cooperation and assistance, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. CESCR General Comment 14 states clearly that “given that some diseases are easily transmissible beyond the frontiers of a State, the international community has a collective responsibility to address this problem. The economically developed States parties have a special responsibility and interest to assist the poorer developing states in this regard”.²

In addition to supporting the development and distribution of diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines for COVID-19 in a manner that ensures equal access for all persons between and within countries, including through the ACT-Accelerator and the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), wealthier states such as the G20 have the obligation to assist states that are struggling to mobilise adequate financial resources to respond to the pandemic. International development assistance should be increased, and not diverted from other areas of assistance. Obligations to repay existing sovereign debt must be reviewed to ensure that they do not prevent states from ensuring access to essential levels of people’s health, livelihoods, and other human rights. Debt repayments should not come at the cost of protecting health, livelihoods and the right to an adequate standard of living during the pandemic, or the recovery.

Amnesty International is calling on the G20 to go beyond its currently agreed debt relief measures by cancelling the external sovereign debt payments in 2020 and 2021 of all countries needing such relief to respond to or recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by longer term debt sustainability discussions, with robust human rights impact assessments built in to ensure that the economic and social rights of

¹ All member states with the exception of Saudi Arabia and the USA have ratified the ICESCR; the USA has signed but not ratified it.

² CESCR General Comment 14, para. 40 (on health); CESCR General Comment No. 19, para 41 (on social security).

all are guaranteed. In particular, this should include the 77 poorest countries.³ Debt cancellation should be accompanied by robust transparency and accountability mechanisms at the national level to ensure that money freed up is not lost to corruption or wasteful expenditure.

At the same time, the global nature of the pandemic has clearly illustrated the important role of multilateral institutions in coordinating a global response. This was recognized by G20 Health Ministers in their 2019 declaration, which recognized the need to strengthen WHO's central role and to ensure that the UN system has proper mechanisms in place to cope with a future global health crisis. It also explicitly supported the leadership and coordination of WHO in the event of Public Health Emergencies (PHE) of international concern as the central institution in the global health architecture and as the lead of the global health cluster including recognized benefits of sustained financing in support of the effective implementation of the Health Emergencies Program⁴. Even during the current global economic recession, multilateral and regional institutions must be supported, including financially, in their endeavours for the common good of humanity.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS

Amnesty International is making the following recommendations to member states of the G20 and to those invited to the 2020 process as they develop G20 COVID-19 Action Plans and national level recovery and economic stimulus packages:

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

- Analyse the funding gaps in all pillars of the ACT-Accelerator on a regular basis and make financial commitments to fulfil them to enable less wealthy states to access any diagnostic, therapeutic or vaccine tools as needed, without diverting needed funds for international development assistance.
- Work with all partners in the ACT-Accelerator to ensure strong governance;
 - Include specific provisions in agreements with private companies receiving funding through the ACT-Accelerator to ensure that resulting health products are accessible, affordable and open to all, and build this into any Advance Market Commitments that are developed;
 - Require companies to provide transparent information about the actual costs they incur in development and production.
- Join the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) if not already a member.
- Cancel existing debt until the end of 2021 for all countries needing such relief to respond to or recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the 77 poorest countries, and ensure longer term debt sustainability that enables debtor countries to guarantee the human rights of all without discrimination;
 - Put in place robust transparency and accountability mechanisms at the national level to ensure that money freed up through the cancellation of debt repayments is not lost to corruption or wasteful expenditure.
- Support multilateral institutions such as the UN and its relevant bodies such as the World Health Organization, and equivalent bodies at the regional level, including by paying all regular budget assessments at the earliest date possible;
 - Consider paying additional contributions, including to make up for contributions that less wealthy countries are unable to pay in the short term.
- Explicitly and publicly recognise the important role that human rights defenders play in responding to the pandemic, including the monitoring of government responses in relation to international cooperation and assistance, and ensure they are protected from physical and verbal attack and enabled carry out their important work.

COVID-19 is not only a health and economic, but also a human rights crisis. It has also shown us that governments are capable of urgent, fast, decisive and multi-sectorial action in the emergency response that protects economic, social and cultural rights. This is an opportunity for the G20 to demonstrate global leadership on international cooperation and assistance as we move from emergency to recovery, to create a “new normal”, that is just, fair and leaves no one behind.

³ As defined by the World Bank's International Development Association as 'lowest-income countries' or are on the UN list of least developed countries.

⁴ Declaration: G20 Meeting of Health Ministers, 4 October 2018, Argentina, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2018/2018-10-04-health.html>