Towards a people-centered and sustainable approach to COVID-19
April 2020

The UN was born out of the global crisis of the second world war. Now, 75 years later, another crisis faces us. How can we both reaffirm the Charter commitment to collective action and bring to this crisis the lessons we have learned about offering integrated support in partnership with the communities we accompany, leaving no one behind? Recent thinking on people-centered and sustainable approaches to complex crisis offers some initial ideas[1]:

- **_Align crisis response with longer term development and peace efforts._** Even in the midst of a complex crisis, actions will have a more sustainable impact, and will be more resource efficient, when they are aligned with longer term strategies that foster resilience. Resilient communities, that are better able to meet local needs, are just and inclusive and have robust mechanisms for addressing inequality, difference and grievances. This axiom is just as true at the level of grassroots service delivery as it is at a national level. How do response efforts align with local and regional plans for sustainable development and peace?

- **_Prioritize inclusion in analysis, planning, and decision-making._** In more settled times, we have learned that including the perspectives and concerns of marginalized and vulnerable populations, including women and youth, of minorities, and above all of local people directly impacted, is vital to effective and sustainable development, humanitarian action, and political and security efforts. Inclusion is just as important in the midst of crisis, where engaging endogenous capacities and perspectives is critical to developing more effective approaches that can have a lasting impact.

- **_Support calls to choose compassion over violence._** QUNO supports the UN Secretary-General's call for a global cease-fire to enable humanitarian access and make space for building peace. Are there ways to go beyond this, to step aside from the machinery of war? A next step can be to call a halt to the use of sanctions that indiscriminately punish entire populations. Further, the choice can be made to freeze military spending, (including for nuclear weapons), freeing up critical resources to save lives and support the most vulnerable. Within countries, governments can choose to avoid using state violence as a response to large-scale unemployment and displacement, and state and nonstate actors alike can eschew violence as a shortcut to achieve political and economic ends.

- **_Reaffirm multilateralism and international norms as a safeguard for the most vulnerable._** At times of global crisis, in an environment of increasing fragility and fragmentation, it is vital to reaffirm international norms, to bolster adherence to international human rights and humanitarian law, support responsible trade, reduce arms flows, and promote constructive financial, tax and investment practices. In crisis, more than ever, states should seek to uphold a rules-based system, the underpinning of an enabling environment that privileges the long-term development, peace and human rights of all people and communities.

- **_Notice, reflect, and build back better._** Crisis can expose the fault lines in our societies, in our approaches to the three UN pillars of international development, peace and security and human rights, and in our regional and global governance structures. Sometimes in the past, as urgency subsides, policy-makers have gone back to business as usual, ignoring the failings that had become all too apparent. At whatever scale, how can we better pay attention to what isn't working, and then reflect and use those lessons as the basis for rebuilding better?

---

[1] A number of these suggestions were developed in the Peacebuilders' Statement for the International Day of Peace 2019, which was signed by 130 global peacebuilding organizations