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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Associazione Comunita Papa Giovanni XXIII, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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COVID-19: a call to the right to international solidarity

The Covid-19 pandemic represents the biggest challenge for humanity after the World War II. This imperceptible, unknown virus that reminded us of our fragility, has hit almost all countries and regions. We are in the midst of a global crisis that has brought the world's peoples and the economy literally to their knees. By turning the world upside down, COVID-19 has enlightened all the contradictions of our societies shaped by neoliberalism and a wrong model of globalisation.

This pandemic proved that health constitutes the basis of wealth and people should come first. Governments, in fact, had to explicitly prioritise people's health over the economy leaving behind the unrealistic and dysfunctional goal of economic growth. The pandemic also taught us, as Pope Francis said,¹ that "for better or worse all our actions affect others because everything is connected in our common home".

In these last months, we have witnessed with gratitude the great courage and commitment of doctors, nurses, people stocking the supermarket shelves, cleaners, caretakers, transporters, public security officials, volunteers, priests, religious people and so many others who have been in the front-line to preserve our health and well-being. Similarly, every one of us has also been called to contributing to the common good by acting responsibly and actively participated into the caring system with those domestic economic activities – childcare, cooking, cleaning- that are fundamental, but usually not considered valuable by most economists.

There have been consistent acts of solidarity by many people in their countries as well as among countries - whether genuine and/or politically driven-, but also (and regrettably) blaming and shaming among some leaders of the most powerful countries. The scientific community, whose role has become fundamental for our sake, has been sometimes divided and contradictory in facing a still unknown enemy. The World Health Organisation has been severely attacked seeing its funds drastically cut. An "infodemic" seems to compete with the real pandemic spreading fake news and conspiratorial theories. Social media fomented this phenomenon, even though on the other hand have proven to be crucial in this period of physical distancing.

We have witnessed our mother earth showing signs of partial recovering due to the reduction of pollution and of the decreased consumerism resulting from the lockdown: the sky has become clearer, the waters more limpid, some species that were at risk of disappearing started to reproduce themselves again.

The pandemic and the necessary measures to control it such as the strategy of lockdown based on the success of countries that rapidly "controlled" so far the outbreak, have highlighted the inequalities within and between countries and posed serious threats to the enjoyment of human rights around the world especially in regard to the right to health, life, water and sanitation, education, food, shelter, work, freedom of movement, liberty, freedom of assembly, freedom from discrimination and gender-based violence as well as the right to development.

Once more, the most vulnerable in our world such as people living in extreme poverty, those suffering from hunger and malnutrition, the homeless, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons just to mention a few, are bearing the brunt of the humanitarian, economic, social consequences of this catastrophic pandemic.

Where are we going from here? As Muhammad Yunus, the Nobel Peace prize, *recently said in his intervention at the Lateran University*² "The big question that we have to answer is: Do we take the world back to where it was before Coronavirus came? Or, we redesign the world? Decision is entirely ours."

¹ <https://cathnews.com/cathnews/37754-pope-shares-his-vision-for-covid-19-aftermath>.

² "No Going Back. The World Economy after Covid-19 Pandemic" - Speech of Mr. Muhammad Yunus, at the Lateran University, 15 May 2020.

Every crisis represents also an opportunity and we are confronted with an unparalleled one: the opportunity to develop the “antibodies of solidarity”³ in order to respond together to so many global challenges.

The Covid-19 pandemic brings back very clearly that States should cooperate in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations (UN) and reveals the necessity to strengthen the principle of solidarity for the purpose of addressing global challenges and for the promotion of universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

While waiting for a vaccine that could combat the Covid-19 infection by developing antibodies in the world population, Member States could commit themselves by adopting a sort of “vaccine” that culturally, politically, legally and economically aims to prevent global threats by removing the root causes of inequalities and vulnerabilities. How?

First of all, our human family has at its disposal a very important instrument, which is the draft declaration on the right to international solidarity⁴ presented by Ms. Virginia Dandan at the 35th regular session of the Human Rights Council.

The draft declaration defines not only the principle of international solidarity as the “the expression of a spirit of unity among individuals, peoples, States and international organizations, encompassing the union of interests, purposes and actions and the recognition of different needs and rights to achieve common goals”⁵ with its three fundamental components “of preventive solidarity, reactive solidarity and international cooperation”,⁶ but also affirms international solidarity as «a human right by which individuals and peoples are entitled, on the basis of equality and non-discrimination, to participate meaningfully in, contribute to and enjoy a social and international order in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized»⁷, establishing positive obligations of States.⁸

We often heard during this crisis the leitmotiv “we are all on the same boat”. This is not entirely correct: we are in the same storm, but equipped with very different boats. The capacity to face the emergency and to be resilient enough to overcome it, proved to be still too much linked to unchosen factors such as where we are born, our families’ income, the access to safe dwellings and caring neighbourhoods, the level of pollution, the preparedness and accessibility to the health system, or the integrity of our leaders and their interest for the common good. These structural inequalities have been crucial in determining very different outcomes, even though with the same virus, across all the countries.

The right to international solidarity is a fundamental tool that aims to make sure that any country can count on mutual help and assistance, bringing to an institutional level those acts of solidarity that we daily witnessed at a grassroots level during this crisis, among the citizens, and that are part of our human nature.

Second, it is vital to revamp multilateralism and international cooperation, to strengthen the multilateral institutions such as the World Health Organisation and reform the Bretton Wood system by ensuring equal representation of countries in the decision-making process.

There is also need of implementing new economic models that are sustainable, people-centred and inclusive with the goal to find, organise and maintain a balance between human needs and planetary boundaries. As Pope Francis recalled in the encyclical “Laudato Sii”, the cry of the poor and of the earth should at last be heard and an integral ecology realized.

Furthermore, it is urgent to cancel the debt of the least developed countries, to stop applying unilateral coercive measures in order to allow the importation of medicines, medical equipment and basic necessities for the population badly affected by the economic sanctions.

³ Pontifical Academy for Life: “Pandemic and Universal Brotherhood”, Note on the Covid-19 emergency, 30 March 2020.

⁴ Annex of report A/HRC/35/35.

⁵ Article 1 of the Draft Declaration on the right to international solidarity.

⁶ Article 2 of the Draft Declaration on the right to international solidarity.

⁷ Article 4 of the Draft Declaration on the right to international solidarity.

⁸ Articles 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the Draft Declaration on the right to international solidarity.

In regard to health, everyone in the world should have free (or at least affordable) access to any vaccines or treatments for COVID-19, regardless of where they were developed. This implies that national and international patent regimes should be revised according to the TRIP flexibilities, letting public health concerns prevail on profit making. Healthcare should not be considered as a commodity but seen for what it really is: a right. States should be committed to achieve universal health coverage and guarantee access to treatment for all.

In addition, if article 7 of the Declaration on the right to development⁹ would be implemented, a significant reduction in military expenditures could release a lot of resources that can be redirected towards social expenditures and achievement of the SDGs.

Finally, we would like to echo Mr. Okafor, the Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity, who recently said in a statement,¹⁰ that “States and non-state actors must begin to take international solidarity much more seriously in the struggle to optimally realise all human rights around the world” and urged States to adopt the draft declaration on the right to international solidarity.

In supporting Mr. Okafor’ appeal, APG23 would like to remark that the recognition of the right to international solidarity is an inescapable necessity for our humanity in order to face all the actual and future global challenges.

Therefore, we urge the permanent mission of Cuba, main sponsor of the resolution on human rights and international solidarity, to push forward the draft Declaration and invite the Member States to adopt it at the UN Human Rights Council and the General Assembly.

We also recommend speeding up the process of adopting the Draft UN Binding Legal Instrument on the Right to Development, a very important element of hard law that together with the other human rights treaties could help the human family to develop the “antibodies of solidarity”.

⁹ “All States should promote the establishment, maintenance and strengthening of international peace and security and, to that end, should do their utmost to achieve general and complete disarmament under effective international control, as well as to ensure that the resources released by effective disarmament measures are used for comprehensive development, in particular that of the developing countries” (art. 7 of DRTD).

¹⁰ «UN expert urges adoption of draft declaration on international solidarity» Press release by the independent Expert on Human rights and international solidarity endorsed also by the Special Rapporteur on the right to development and the Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, 5/6/2020.