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

### **Written statement\* submitted by Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, 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.

[21 May 2022]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



## **Good governance in promoting and protecting human rights during and after the COVID-19 pandemic: South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Coronavirus threatens not only public health, but also governance, democracy, peace, and security. Regimes with poor constitutional systems, lack of accountability, entrenched impunity and historical and structural inequalities fought the epidemic by human rights and the rule of law. Respecting human rights is necessary for solving public health crises. Governments must not use the coronavirus pandemic as a reason to suppress people or ideas.

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights submitted this intervention to know how South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo achieved good governance. It is how public institutions manage public affairs and manage public resources to enhance the rule of law and human rights.

### **First: South Sudan**

On April 5, 2020, South Sudan registered the first coronavirus case. The spread of the virus has exacerbated the humanitarian situations. Out of the 11 million people in South Sudan, 7.5 million need humanitarian assistance, while more than 6 million live in famine. Moreover, only less than half of the health care facilities in the country are functioning. The facilities in operation are understaffed and poorly equipped. There are only 24 intensive care beds in the whole country.

On March 20, 2020, South Sudan established a high-level task force to coordinate the national response to COVID-19. However, school closures left tens of thousands of children and young people without proper education, and they resort to homeschooling or digital classes that are not readily available. In such situations, young people are more likely to be sexually assaulted or recruited by government forces and armed opposition groups. (1)

In these situations, effective governance is significant to combat the spread of the coronavirus. The Government of South Sudan's delay to agree on a new legislature has weakened authority at the subnational level. It became difficult to develop strategies to address local violence, as in Jonglei State. During March and April 2022, armed clashes erupted in the oil-rich Al Wahdah State between forces loyal to President S. K. and those of his deputy, R. M., shortly after negotiations to unify the leadership of the South Sudanese army by the 2018 peace agreement (2).

Despite the participation of women in the international frameworks of Security Council Resolution 1325 and the active role they played at various levels in bringing peace to South Sudan, they ignored women's role during the political negotiations during the Coronavirus period. The 15-member National Task Force for Coronavirus said that women are under representation, although this body made policies that impact women's lives. Although women were appointed to the revitalized transitional government, their decision-making powers are limited, and Social protection was reduced, so women cannot access the courts to report cases of sexual violence (3).

### **Second: Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has faced many economic and social challenges in the coronavirus crisis. The role of institutions has emerged in their ability to deal with these challenges during and after the pandemic.

#### **A. The problem of lack of information and the spread of rumors**

In some regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congolese Ministry of Health and international organizations established a system to alert and refute rumors. It trained health workers, religious leaders, and journalists to detect and manage misinformation. It aims to provide the public with accurate information about the coronavirus to gain societal acceptance for vaccines that save more lives. It aims to face rumors about coronavirus

treatments and medical advice (4). At the epidemic beginning, rumors and misinformation about the coronavirus and its vaccines spread among the Muslim community in Kinshasa. It said that the vaccines were made from pork gelatin.

The doctor was photographed examining the materials involved in making the vaccine and dismantling the vaccine's formulation, allowing residents to see that it did not contain pork gelatin to counter such rumors. The Ministry established a rumor alert system and trained health workers, religious leaders, and journalists to detect and manage misinformation (5).

Since August, the Information Response Consortium was provided rumor monitoring to more than 20 people in government institutions and another 160 in the provinces of Haut-Katanga, Kinshasa, and Kong Central. Viral Facts Africa videos and posts on the authorized website are also used to face rumors circulating in the community.

More than 600 health workers with direct access to the community were trained to identify the false information about the COVID-19 vaccine, and about 144 media professionals were trained to verify facts and reliability of sources, particularly regarding online content.

## **B. Economic Measures**

The state created a fund to support spending actions related to the crisis, considering the decrease in the key interest rate from 9.0% to 7.5%, and issued a decision to support the company's activities through financing from the Fund for the Advancement of Industry (FPI) at a zero rate and encouraged Credit to the food and pharmaceutical sectors. It granted grace periods for loan repayments to January 1, 2022, considering the situation caused by the coronavirus, and set the requirement for a minimum capital of banks equivalent to 50 million US dollars. It increased the monthly limit for daily e-money transaction amounts and the monthly e-transaction limit to USD 2,500 (or equivalent in CDF - the currency of the Democratic Republic of the Congo). It suspended the application of late payment penalties for late receivables during the crisis period.

Regarding water and electricity services, a two-month supply of water and electricity has been granted free of charge to families and hospitals, and micro, small and medium enterprises affected by the closures as part of the response against the Coronavirus. The eviction of tenants who did not fulfill their obligations was also prohibited from March to June 2020. Police barriers and checkpoints within national companies were removed to reduce overcrowding which increases the chances of transmission (6).

## **Recommendations**

In this contribution, Maat revealed some facts about the two countries' commitment to good governance and the extent of commitment to human rights standards.

Therefore, Maat makes the following recommendations:

First: Maat recommends that the Government of South Sudan establish functional, effective, and accountable governance structures at the central and local levels. The transformation of the conflict from the national to the state level should also be addressed and security sector reform is accelerated. The proceeds of South Sudan must also be used for the benefit of the population of South Sudan, including the provision of health and social care services.

Second: Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights urges the Human Rights Council to review the state's efforts to fulfill its international obligations in human rights in Corona times and exceptional cases in particular. Especially since many African countries treat exceptional cases as normal ones.

Third: Maat recommends that the states of South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo should respect freedom of expression and the right to access information to facilitate the correct information on the spread of the virus. It also calls on the two countries to take measures to secure the protection of girls and women and ensure accountability for those who continue to commit rape and sexual violence.

Fourth: In responding to the pandemic, governments should give special attention to the most vulnerable, guarantee the right to health care and the highest attainable standard of living without discrimination, and the right to food, education, water, and sanitation.

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- (1): <https://bit.ly/3wjd21R>
- (2): <https://bit.ly/3FVJTgk>
- (3): <https://bit.ly/3wiKJ3E>
- (4): <https://bit.ly/3sJuE4T>
- (5): <https://bit.ly/39xtpzb>
- (6): <https://bit.ly/3LnDImk>