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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 International Institute for Non-Aligned Studies, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

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

[17 August 2022]

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

Human Rights facing the heat of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The modern world has witnessed a lot both in positive as well as negative sense. While some nations reached the zenith of development and success, many countries had to face the heat waves of unprecedented challenges thus threatening the human rights situations in the country. The COVID pandemic became the largest bottleneck for growth in the 21st Century, which not only impacted developing countries but also the developed nations and many countries promoting the ideals of coercion took it as an opportunity to curb the human rights of people and thus make them more vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a broad spectrum of human rights violations around the world.

Pandemic or any other natural disaster open a window for human rights violators to take advantage of the situation and carry out their malicious activities that threaten humanity at large. Many might question the credibility for linking the COVID pandemic to human rights but if we dig deeper, we will realise that crisis situation is what human rights violators wait for so as to strengthen their base and take advantage of the vulnerabilities of the people.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights substantiates the right of people, irrespective of nationality, colour, gender, etc., to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and requires that countries invest the maximum available resources in taking conscious steps in attaining the same goals. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also upholds related economic and social rights, such as the right to food, right to clean drinking water, right to education, right to form labour unions, etc.

Health crisis like the COVID pandemic generated a sense of fear and many people who got affected with the virus were earlier stigmatized and had to face inequality in some way or the other. Coronavirus being highly contagious drifted people apart from each other and instead of sympathy, fear and hatred started filling the void created due to preventive measures like lockdown. Many countries even crossed the line for human rights violations by criminalising exposure to Covid-19 despite being aware of the fact that penalising transmission is a waste of time and resources, and it only heightens stigma and blame that comes in the way of response mechanism to deal with the crisis. Criminalisation of exposure to Covid-19 made several people reluctant to test or disclose their symptoms thus increasing the pressure to source down the chain of transmission.

At one hand, many countries tried the very best to strengthen health governance and spread awareness regarding the virus, on the other hand there were several countries who ignored the seriousness associated with the Coronavirus and because of the insignificant measures taken by the administration, several lives were lost to the virus. Vaccines too became a medium to discriminate with several powerful countries or the major high-income countries stockpiled millions more doses than they could use, leaving some countries able to vaccinate their entire populations three to five times over. This is a display of sheer selfishness.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronavirus had claimed at least 5.5 million lives by the end of 2021, though some estimates suggest the actual number of deaths could be two to three times higher. Meanwhile, by the end of the year, less than 8% of Africa's 1.2 billion people had been fully vaccinated, the lowest vaccination rate of any continent in the world and a far cry from the WHO's 40% vaccination target by the end of 2021. Such global vaccine inequality further entrenched racial injustice.

The right to health has faced great challenges since 2020 as the healthcare system of many countries, not just underdeveloped or developing countries but also developed countries, collapsed at the face of the pandemic that has put unprecedented pressure upon the health infrastructures of the country. Despite, abrupt lockdown being the only feasible solution at the face of the Covid pandemic so as to control the transmission of the virus, especially after health infrastructure failed to take the increasing burden, the pandemic took a toll on several countries across the globe on social, political, medical, economical and human rights front. It became a means to differentiate, a means to challenge food security especially for people belonging to the minorities sections that became more vulnerable, a medium to impact livelihood and education as everything was engulfed in the slumber of complete lockdown.

It is imperative to understand that the world has made insufficient inroads on the underlying issues of human rights violations and political determinants tend to fuel the crisis if the country is already in a volatile state. Surveillance and policing took a center stage during the lockdown with armed forces in many countries were tasked to impose the lockdowns so as to break the chain of transmission of the virus. It is worth noting that COVID instigated lockdowns have brought with them the most expansive police and military presence in many countries since the World War-II which also instilled a sense of fear.

The minority section of several countries has been openly blamed for the virus while women and children were exposed to sexual and physical violence owing to limited or no social contact and the risks has been even more for women and children in displacement due to conflicts or climate disasters. Many had to face the evil of transactional sex in order to fulfill their basic necessities, while the elderly section of the society of many countries faced discrimination and neglect.

The Coronavirus pandemic has taught the world a very valuable lesson and that is value for human life and no human life is valuable unless its rights are respected. As the pandemic has yet not diminished fully, it is imperative that we acknowledge the importance of human rights irrespective of any crisis the world enters into.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2022/03/annual-report-202122/>