

## Pandemics and the Challenges of Sustaining Peace

On 1 July 2020 the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously adopted Resolution 2532 (2020), recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic could reverse peacebuilding gains made by countries in transition and post-conflict countries. On August 12, 2020, Secretary-General António Guterres, former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, and Sarah Cliffe, director of New York University's Center on International Cooperation, briefed the Security Council on the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for conflict prevention. The following is a summary of key points from Cliffe's remarks.

### How will the second-generation impacts of the pandemic affect conflict?

- The COVID-19 economic shock is the deepest since World War II and the broadest since 1870. Projections now suggest that the global economy is likely to contract by 5% this year—a threshold that research shows is correlated with a much higher risk of conflict.
- Physical meetings for peace negotiations and elections are now a challenge. The pandemic has led many countries to postpone elections, meaning 2021 may see double the number of countries holding elections from what was originally scheduled. Election disputes are a trigger for conflict.
- We are seeing local spikes in food prices in conflict zones in many countries, such as Afghanistan, DRC, Syria, and Yemen. Historically, food prices are *the* typical risk factor for increased conflict.
- Countries that depend on remittances from workers abroad may be especially vulnerable. The World Bank projects that remittances will decline by 110 billion dollars this year, or equivalent to more than two thirds of the entire global overseas development assistance budget.
- Inequality in access to public health goods is a risk. Developing countries' difficulty in procuring PPE, test kits, medicines, and equipment, has already widened the gap in capacity to suppress COVID-19 and has damaged trust. This gap is set to widen further when vaccines are found.

### What opportunities for peacebuilding are present?

- Opinion polls in all regions show trust a high demand for more international collective action—people have been reminded of the importance of governments and multilateral cooperation.
- There is an opportunity to strengthen implementation of UNSC Resolution 2532 and the call for a universal ceasefire, including by engaging more closely with region and sub-regional bodies.
- By linking responses across humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding areas and adopting conflict-sensitive approaches that are sovereignty-supporting, the UN and international financial institutions can help national governments address risks before they escalate.
- Global investment in universal health, especially equal access to vaccines, is more important than ever—because the pandemic has taught us that no one is safe until everyone is safe.
- The UNSC's attention to these issues is important, because socioeconomic problems may *become* international threats to peace and security if they are not addressed. COVID-19 is an example of an extreme public health and economic shock that deserves to qualify as a peacebuilding risk.