

A global assistance package to tackle the global coronavirus pandemic

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The coronavirus is a global challenge, and a global response is therefore the only option. No country can cope with the coronavirus crisis and its already devastating consequences alone. If we work against each other, we will all lose in the end. We can and will only overcome this crisis through cooperation and dialogue.

In many countries, including in Germany, public, economic and cultural life has been at a standstill for weeks. Drastic steps have been taken to keep health systems from collapsing. And nonetheless, we are anxiously looking at the infection graphs and worrying about our family members and friends. Like many other countries, Germany has put together an unprecedented rescue package for businesses and workers to contain the economic and social consequences. Unfortunately, not all countries are in a position to do so.

The coronavirus is impacting everyone, irrespective of their origins, gender or skin colour. Yet, already vulnerable populations are most affected. This applies, in particular, to people who live in countries with weakened public institutions and health systems, where social safety nets are inadequate or non-existent, and where there is a lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities. In addition, the economic consequences and responses are distributed unevenly: while many European countries, the United States and China can afford to put together gigantic assistance packages at short notice, many developing countries are much more likely to plunge into devastating economic and currency crises.

We therefore need a global response to the coronavirus crisis which is based on solidarity. Germany and the EU have the economic means, and thus also a great responsibility, to take action now to prevent the risk of the imminent death of millions of people, increasing human rights violations, the dismantling of democratic achievements and severe economic turmoil affecting entire regions.

Solidarity with the world's most vulnerable people and fair, respectful cooperation on equal terms is, for Europe, the right course of action in terms of both head and heart. If Europe fails to act now, others will fill the gap and attempt to expand their geopolitical influence even further. Populists and autocrats around the world are trying to outdo each other in terms of restrictions on fundamental rights. They are denying the reality, embracing fake news and taking unilateral, "my country first" approaches. We can only contain this crisis effectively, however, by putting global solidarity first and standing up for civil and human rights, and doing so by democratic means.

If Europe fails to take action now together with partners around the world, the feared global economic and financial crisis will be much more severe, with devastating consequences for millions of people. And if Europe fails to act, there will be increasing risks, of conflicts flaring up again, further disintegration of state structures, a massive rise in poverty, even greater oppression of human rights activists, and even more people losing their homes, especially in many countries in the Global South. We cannot allow global inequality to be further exacerbated by this crisis.

Germany must therefore press for a strong joint response to this pandemic in the United Nations, the EU, the G20 and other international organisations. In particular, the G20's pledges, on paper, to invest more than five trillion to tackle the crisis must be backed up by actual resources. We need a global assistance package to tackle the coronavirus and its consequences. In the short term, the Federal Government must make at least an additional two billion euros available for development cooperation and humanitarian aid. The Federal Government needs to build support within Europe, the OECD and the United Nations for joint assistance efforts and to provide rapid and targeted

support for less developed countries, countries in the Global South, crisis-stricken regions and refugee camps in their efforts to tackle the pandemic. To this end, additional funding must be provided for existing bilateral and multilateral measures in the health sector of development cooperation.

Strengthening international cooperation at a time of crisis

No country can defeat this pandemic and its consequences alone. The virus will return over and over again unless we succeed in finding an effective global response to counter the dual challenge of a health crisis and an economic crisis. It is good that emergency measures are finally being coordinated in the European Union (EU) framework. However, the Federal Government must advocate in all international formats that countries which are in a position to do so provide rapid and efficient international assistance according to their means.

- The United Nations (UN) is the only body which can coordinate international policy with all countries in the world. They should be strengthened in the context of efforts to combat the pandemic. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, the Federal Government should press for the establishment of a **UN coronavirus task force** and a **UN-led coronavirus assistance fund** to support countries with weak health systems; in line with Norway's request. The UN Security Council should declare the pandemic a "threat to humanity and world peace" and thereby – similarly to the Ebola epidemic in 2014/15 – support the UN Secretary-General in his efforts.
- The Federal Government should make a generous contribution to the **UN Humanitarian Response Plan** of 25 March 2020, which calls for funding to be allocated to tackle the pandemic in especially vulnerable countries and, to this end, provides for measures such as building sanitation facilities and airlifts for humanitarian goods. The Federal Government must ensure that the resources allocated are also made accessible to **civil-society stakeholders**.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** is taking the lead in this crisis and, as a UN specialised agency, is the most important organisation in the field of global health. It therefore needs to be significantly strengthened in terms of resources and its mandate. The Federal Government must substantially increase its non-earmarked contributions to WHO and place them on a permanent footing. The **G20 countries** should give WHO a formal seat, given its pivotal role, as is already the case for other organisations such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and provide it with greater financial support to allow significant improvements in the areas of reporting, information and the provision of test kits.
- The key industrialised countries and emerging economies in the **Group of Twenty (G20)** have the economic and political strength to respond to the coronavirus crisis in political and economic terms. They must live up to this responsibility.
- In the context of **Germany's forthcoming Presidency of the Council of the EU**, the **Federal Government should seek** to further expand and strengthen the scope for action of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). Its announcement on this issue is a first step in the right direction. The Federal Government must also seek, within the EU, to ensure that the EU accession countries also receive continuous and effective support in tackling the coronavirus pandemic.
- As an important **signal on physical distancing**, international bodies should, firstly, continue to meet and, secondly, hold only virtual meetings if at all possible.

Supporting people in the worst-affected countries and stabilising the global economy

Since the end of January, there has been an unprecedented outflow of capital from the countries in the Global South. While their national currencies are losing much of their value, their debts are usually in dollars and unaffected. Over 120 countries in the Global South are at the limits of debt sustainability and many of them are now already close to default. The insolvency of these countries would also have very painful effects on the western financial system and would therefore cost us much more than taking action now.

The United Nations Development Programme expects the poorest countries to lose more than 220 billion US dollars in income. Half of all jobs in countries of the Global South could be lost as a result of the coronavirus crisis. Many countries are also affected by other crises, such as the consequences of the climate emergency, other diseases, conflicts or famines. The Federal Government must make additional funding available via development cooperation and help to ensure, in the framework of the G20, the World Bank and the IMF, that well-coordinated, rapid action is taken to stabilise the economic and financial systems.

Although we are currently still in the immediate crisis management phase, the Paris climate targets and the global Sustainable Development Goals must continue to apply in the medium- to long-term assistance measures, both despite and because of the coronavirus crisis. We will fail as an international community if the measures now planned ultimately contribute to the accelerated destruction of the natural foundations of life. This must be prevented.

- In the framework of existing bilateral and multilateral measures in the field of health, the Federal Government must provide **greater financial, technical and scientific support to its development cooperation partner countries**, especially with regard to basic healthcare and the strengthening of health systems. To this end, it must also continue its bilateral cooperation in the field of health instead of ending it, as planned. Social factors such as poverty, education, food and housing must be taken into consideration in this context.
- Concrete and timely **debt relief is needed, as well as debt swaps and the reallocation of resources from debt repayments** to measures in the field of health and measures to tackle the economic and social consequences. In the short term, it could be helpful to substantially increase the size of the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT). In addition, decisions need to be taken at United Nations level with regard to a **sovereign debt restructuring mechanism**.
- **Health is a human right:** Progress made on the detection and treatment of coronavirus infection and on the development of vaccines must be made accessible to all countries worldwide and offered on affordable terms. To this end, scientists, international organisations, countries and leading manufacturers must work together for the common good and in the spirit of the 2001 Doha Declaration, particularly with the aim of strengthening the human right to health and promoting access to medicines via the "TRIPS flexibilities". As soon as they have been developed, coronavirus vaccines or medicines must be made accessible to as many people as possible via a global approach, using large production capacities. Patents and profits must not be allowed to stand in the way of this.
- **Customs duties and other trade barriers that apply to medical devices**, medicinal products and similar goods which are essential in the battle against the coronavirus pandemic should be removed not just at EU level, but also at global level, in order to facilitate the procurement of these goods worldwide, especially by poorer countries.
- As the world shifts to a **pandemic economy**, the question of how necessary goods can be produced and procured must be answered not just at national and European level, but also

in terms of **global solidarity**, with due consideration for the least developed countries, crisis-stricken regions and refugees, and taking into account supply chains and competition on procurement. It makes sense and is beneficial for everyone if, for example, textile companies in the Global South are given support to convert to **producing protective clothing and masks** in order to meet regional demand and the immense level of global demand, rather than existing orders worth billions simply being cancelled. In addition, supplies of medical personal protective equipment should be made available to international aid organisations so that those providing emergency assistance in the most difficult conditions are not left at the mercy of the competition and race between countries to obtain supplies in the global market.

- Where possible, **projects in the framework of development cooperation, humanitarian aid and civilian crisis prevention should be continued** in order to avoid making the situation worse by terminating the projects. European – not just German – personnel who voluntarily remain in the countries concerned must, depending on the technical capacities, also be deployed to deal with the crisis and, to this end, must be given the necessary equipment and be supported closely by Germany's missions in the countries concerned.
- The **World Bank and the regional development banks** should make additional funding available on a large scale. This could take the form of **increasing the capital** of the development banks, for example, or unconditional **social cash transfers** for people in the countries concerned.
- The **International Monetary Fund** must allocate **additional special drawing rights**. These are a kind of artificial currency which countries can then exchange for hard currency. The emergency financing which has already been announced must be open to the worst-affected countries and must not be tied to conditions which would force them to implement austerity policies. It does not help anyone if the health sector is weakened or the economic and social downturn is exacerbated. The effect of the IMF's programmes that undermined health sectors for years have already been criticized in the Ebola crisis; these mistakes must not be repeated.
- Women make up around 70 per cent of workers in the health and social sector worldwide. They are exposed to a heightened risk of infection. At the same time, they are particularly affected by economic slumps. In responding to the coronavirus pandemic, a **feminist international policy** must look at the special situation faced by women and other marginalised groups worldwide and include them in joint responses on equal terms.
- **Access to clean water and sanitation facilities** is a prerequisite in order to promote and secure health in the long term. This access helps to interrupt the routes of transmission and thus also helps to contain numerous diseases. The pivotal importance of water should therefore be taken into account when measures are planned, and should be integrated into assistance measures.

Stopping the coronavirus from aggravating conflicts

The coronavirus is already aggravating conflicts and fuelling new conflicts. At the same time, many existing crises and conflicts are continuing, and war criminals are even seizing the opportunity afforded by our waning attention to make still greater use of violence, oppression and human rights violations. It is essential to prevent parties to conflicts from weaponising the threat posed by the virus by denying medical care and accepting people's deaths as a result of the virus.

The civilian population in the world's crisis-stricken regions must continue to receive support and humanitarian aid, subject to heightened health precautions; we must seek to ensure that civil and

human rights are respected; and the attention we devote to wars and crimes must not wane any further.

- The Federal Government, together with its partners, must make **intensive efforts to bring about an immediate global ceasefire**, as called for by UN Secretary-General António Guterres on 23 March 2020.
- The coronavirus crisis has considerable potential to result in further **destabilisation and social unrest**. Many countries in the Global South are highly dependent on food imports. Where borders are closed, displaced people are stranded and supply chains are interrupted, where lockdowns are introduced, foreign currency is in short supply and prices are rising, there is a risk of food riots. Rapid, forward-looking action must therefore be taken in the countries concerned, with international support, to alleviate and avoid such scenarios. In this context, it is important not to lose sight of the long-term aim of supporting agro-ecology and food sovereignty.
- The Federal Government must work to ensure that **crisis prevention, conflict management and conflict monitoring instruments** continue to be used and expanded by international missions where possible during the coronavirus crisis.

The most vulnerable must not be forgotten

The virus poses a particular risk to people who have been weakened by war, displacement, poverty or hunger – in Syria, South Sudan or Yemen, for example. Overcrowded conditions, a lack of clean water and hygiene products, and inadequate social security and healthcare: all of these factors are alarmingly prevalent in crisis-stricken regions and in most countries of the Global South. Those worst affected by this include older, ill and poor people, women and children, refugees and other marginalised groups.

- **Reliable access to humanitarian aid** is needed worldwide and, even in the event of abrupt border closures, it is essential to ensure it can be provided via **humanitarian corridors**. In cases where access difficulties already existed before the coronavirus crisis, humanitarian access must be provided in view of the particular threat posed by the coronavirus.
- Action against the coronavirus must be integrated into existing humanitarian aid via **“Covid-19 mainstreaming”**, for example in the form of building hygiene stations and taking precautionary measures when distributing relief supplies. The Federal Government must also make new and additional humanitarian funding available for this and for coronavirus-specific projects. It must be possible to reallocate funds in an unbureaucratic manner.
- At the same time, the international community and German humanitarian aid and development cooperation must not scale back **measures in existing health programmes**, such as projects to tackle malaria, cholera, measles or HIV. These diseases have not vanished amidst the coronavirus crisis; instead, the problems exacerbate each other.
- People in refugee camps are at greater risk of coronavirus infection because they live in crowded communal accommodation and have limited or inadequate access to information, water, hygiene facilities and medical care. The suspension of resettlements under the resettlement programme of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) means that many people in refugee camps worldwide are in a hopeless situation. The Federal Government should seek to ensure that the **resettlement programme is resumed by the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration as quickly as possible** and, for its own part, facilitate resettlement arrivals subject to health precautions. Resettlement places which have already been pledged but cannot be filled at present must not be allowed to lapse; instead, they must be added to future pledges. The Federal Government must step up

its efforts to finally put an end to the extreme underfunding of the global infrastructure for refugees.

- At the same time, in view of the global pandemic and to protect all involved, **all deportations must be temporarily suspended** and people in custody awaiting deportation must be released. While medical precautions must be taken, it is unacceptable for the fundamental right to asylum to be restricted, let alone suspended.
- Overcrowded camps for people in search of protection, such as the **Moria “hotspot” on the Greek island of Lesbos**, where the hygiene conditions are catastrophic and medical care is more or less non-existent even in normal circumstances, are at very high risk of being particularly badly affected by the coronavirus. The Federal Government must press for an evacuation, take concrete action itself to pave the way for resettlements, especially with regard to the resettlement places for vulnerable refugees pledged on 8 March 2020, and generally seek to ensure better hygiene conditions in refugee camps.
- Almost nine out of ten **children worldwide** are affected by school closures; many currently have no way of continuing their education. The risk of malnutrition and of physical and sexual abuse rises during a crisis for children in particular, as the Ebola crisis already showed. To protect children worldwide, the Federal Government must make their rights a particular priority in the fields of education, health, social security and gender equality.

Protecting human rights and democracy

Action to protect public health and precautionary measures must not be abused by governments to undermine fundamental rights, as we are already seeing in countries such as China and Rwanda, but also within the EU, in Hungary. Particularly at a time of crisis, democratic processes must be strengthened and disinformation campaigns must be countered effectively.

Local defenders of democracy and human rights, in particular, need special support and attention right now. At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic is already leading to a global rise in racist attacks, especially directed against people who are assumed to be of Asian origin. Racism and exclusion mechanisms must always be confronted wherever they exist.

- The Federal Government should support the call made by 24 UN Special Rapporteurs for **human rights to be upheld in all action taken to address the coronavirus**, and it should take a clear stance if governments subject their populations to disproportionate surveillance or limit their citizens' rights permanently in order to preserve their own power. Given that political and civil-society activism is shifting more and more to the digital sphere, the digital **monitoring and surveillance options available to authoritarian states** must be the subject of particular scrutiny.
- The Federal Government must clearly criticise Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán's **abuse of the crisis** to undermine democracy and the freedom of the press, and it must speak out unequivocally within and outside Europe on such violations.
- People in collective facilities are exposed to a heightened risk of coronavirus infection. For this and other reasons, the plight of political prisoners and arbitrarily detained human rights defenders in prisons worldwide requires our attention. Now more than ever, the Federal Government should redouble its efforts to **seek the release of political prisoners and human rights defenders**.
- **Decisive action is needed against disinformation and fake news** in the battle against the coronavirus pandemic, especially in cooperation with WHO. Companies, particularly in the field of social media, must live up to their responsibilities in this context.

The pandemic will only be over when it has been successfully contained in all regions of the world. The virus does not stop at national borders, and so action to tackle it must also take place at global level. The international community must therefore work together wherever countries lack the necessary resources for tests, medicines and intensive care and to break the chains of infection.

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