

**Remarks for DPPA/PBSO ASG Oscar Fernandez-Taranco's participation in ILO event:
How employment and decent work can contribute to peace and social cohesion in
time of COVID-19 crisis**

Monday, 28 September 2020 (9:30-11:00am)

Zoom

Excellencies, Colleagues, Friends,

I would like to thank the organizers of this important event. I would like to personally thank Guy Ryder for the great collaboration between our institutions at the intersection of peace and decent work, including in the contexts of COVID-19.

I have three key messages:

1. COVID-19 has had important effects on peace and security;
2. Peacebuilding remains a priority, even in the middle of a crisis, as part of comprehensive responses;
3. For comprehensive responses, we need partnerships across Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus to build back better with decent work, trust and inclusive institutions.

First, Despite the pandemic being foremost a health crisis, its wide-ranging humanitarian, economic, human rights and peace and security dimensions have hit conflict settings especially hard. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated vulnerabilities and inequalities, and is threatening development and peacebuilding gains, worsening conflicts or fomenting new ones.

The potential of increased conflict and violence at this time demands our collective attention. In some contexts, fragile peace agreements and containment measures have kept violence to a minimum. In many others, armed groups and other actors have exploited the crisis to their advantage, increasing violence while undermining public health responses.

The Secretary-General has outlined a number of risks to international peace and security to the Security Council, that are particularly pressing, including:

- a further erosion of trust in public institutions if the view is that authorities mishandled the response;
- continued economic fallout that could create greater stressors, potentially leading to more widespread civil unrest; affecting livelihoods and future prospects of particularly young people and women
- postponement of elections or mismanaged elections, leading to a crisis of legitimacy;
- conflict actors exploiting the situation, potentially leading to more violence and making resolution of the conflict more difficult; and

- increased terrorist activity.

Bold action is required to meet the challenge of the moment.

Second, peacebuilding is a critical component of our response.

Without it we are risking increased risk of violent conflicts because of erosion of trust and social cohesion and exacerbated grievances around economic and social justice.

The recently issued Secretary-General's 2020 report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace underscores that multilateral, multidimensional, coordinated responses and whole-of society approaches are imperative to respond to the increasingly complex challenges of the 21st century, including COVID-19.

Prevention anchored in inclusive and sustainable development, based on human rights and gender equality and leaving no one behind provides the best defense against conflict. In the context of COVID-19, prevention also provides the best defense against the erosion of trust and confidence in governments that is needed for effective responses.

The past years' wave of protest movements across the globe were in many cases rooted in economic grievances and disillusionment with the governments' ability to meet legitimate aspirations of people. With the economic fall-out of COVID-19 often affecting the most disenfranchised among us – the issue of livelihoods, employment and social safety nets are integral vehicles to restore trust and confidence in institutions, to sustain peace and to underpin effective handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To this effect, the 2020 UN peacebuilding architecture review has highlighted that prevention, peacebuilding and sustaining peace remain more important than ever to ensure the hard-won development and peacebuilding gains are not lost in crisis-response.

From the outset of the pandemic, the Peacebuilding Commission has led by example as a flexible and dedicated intergovernmental platform, actively meeting on virtual platforms to discuss peacebuilding implications of COVID-19, including in Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and the Pacific region.

The Peacebuilding Fund, in consultation with Resident Coordinators, UN country teams and national partners, has rapidly and flexibly reallocated funds where needed and developed new projects to effectively respond. Priority areas include support to:

- crisis response;
- local peace initiatives and community engagement in implementing ceasefires;

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- inclusive dialogues, including around the response;
- strategic communication to prevent the spread of misinformation and hate speech; and
- strengthening engagement of women and youth in COVID-19 responses.

However, as protesters around the world have shown us: peace is not the same as cessation of hostilities.

This brings me to my **third** point. To address the complex challenges we face, strong partnerships across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus are key to leverage comparative advantages, often with small contributions are catalytic, leading to significant scale-up.

In this context, I would like to thank our Swiss hosts, who have been among the foremost champions of peacebuilding in the UN, chairing the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission since 2009; and the institutional partnership between the UN and the World Bank on crisis-affected settings since its inception in 2010, with a recent 3 million Swiss franc in support of enhanced collaboration across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, which is already supporting strengthened partnership efforts in seven countries.

I would also like to highlight the critical work being supported by Switzerland on enhancing the peacebuilding impact of employment programmes. Noting the compounding nature of the COVID-19 crisis, which has been simultaneously affecting health, livelihood and the ability to sustain peace, the continued collaboration to provide programmatic, advocacy and technical support to countries on the peacebuilding impact of employment remains more important than ever.

I am especially pleased with our recent collaboration with ILO in partnership with WHO and Interpeace on issuing a joint paper, which builds on our earlier work as part of the ILO-PBSO partnerships on the peacebuilding impacts that employment programmes can have: Jobs for Peace.

In conclusion, although presenting new challenges, COVID-19 also offers opportunities to strengthen institutions and social safety nets, create decent work, reduce inequalities and enhance dialogue and social cohesion, including through community participation in response and recovery.

These opportunities must be seized.

Thank you.