

United Nations



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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**Remarks by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and  
Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mark Lowcock, at the launch of the Global  
Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19**

**New York, 25 March 2020**

*As delivered*

Thank you, Melissa. And thank you Secretary-General, Tedros, and Henrietta. The COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan is a joint effort.

It will address the immediate humanitarian consequences of this pandemic in countries which already face other humanitarian crises across South America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

The plan consolidates existing COVID-19 appeals and is based on contributions from the World Health Organization, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHABITAT, UNHCR and UNICEF, as well as contributions from many leading humanitarian NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.

It will be implemented by UN agencies, with international NGOs and NGO consortia playing a direct role in the response.

Properly funded, it will help contain the spread of COVID-19 and it will save lives.

We know the virus is now arriving in some of the places least equipped to deal with it.

Once there it will undoubtedly hit the most vulnerable hardest — including women, older people, people with disabilities, and refugees, migrants and displaced people.

In Africa – Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia have already confirmed their first cases.

The virus is starting to spread across the continent despite efforts by governments and society to hold it back.

In the Middle East – the first case in Syria has been reported.

We know the impacts of this virus in these places could be catastrophic.

So, today's plan will equip humanitarian organizations to fight it.

It will allow UN agencies and NGOs to provide immediate assistance.

For example:

... WHO delivering lab equipment to test for the virus, and medical equipment to treat people;

... UNICEF and UNHCR installing handwashing stations in camps and settlements;

... UNICEF launching public information campaigns on how to protect yourself and others from the virus; and

... WFP establishing eight designated international and regional staging hubs in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. They will provide air transport services through cargo airlifts and passenger transport to get NGO, UN and other aid workers, and aid supplies right to the front line.

... and WFP will also be building supply chains and contracting charter vessels to get humanitarian aid to people who need it, quickly.

The appeal will be regularly updated, probably month by month to keep pace with this virus' spread and impact.

With a pandemic of this nature, there can be no half measures.

So, together, we ask governments to do two things.

First, pledge your support, financially and politically, to this response plan. We need \$2 billion for the nine months from April.

And we need to act now to stem the impact of COVID-19 in already vulnerable humanitarian contexts.

Second, continue to support existing humanitarian response plans. If funding is diverted from those plans to tackle COVID-19 we would create circumstances in which cholera, measles and meningitis can thrive, in which even more children become malnourished, and in which extremists can take control. And that would be the perfect breeding ground for COVID-19.

So, funding this plan by withdrawing funds from ongoing humanitarian responses would be entirely counterproductive.

Not only would it undermine the ability of these countries to handle the virus. It would also undermine our efforts to combat COVID-19 globally.

A wide range of organisations, including many national and international NGOs will have a crucial role to play in the response, and they will be able to access the funding this plan generates through partner arrangements with UN agencies, pooled funding mechanisms – including the UN Central Emergency Response Fund and Country-Based Pooled Funds – and through direct donor funding.

I want to stress that this plan is a plan for the entire Inter-Agency Standing Committee, working through all our clusters, not just the UN family. The airbridges and other services will be available to UN agencies but also to NGOs and other crucial aid workers.

We are also asking donors to top up the Country Based Pool Funds, which are a primary financing vehicle for NGOs, particularly national NGOs.

Because we need the full engagement of the NGO community to reach every affected community.

To kick-start the response plan, I am releasing an additional \$60 million from the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund.

This new CERF allocation – which is one of the largest ever made – will support movement of aid workers and supplies, the protection of those most affected by the pandemic and additional water, health and sanitation services.

This allocation brings the Central Emergency Response Fund's support for humanitarian action in response to the pandemic to \$75 million.

Through the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan, we can prevent the disease from getting a foothold in places with limited healthcare capacity and very little resilience.

Together, we can push this virus back. We are counting on your support.

Thank you.