

## STATEMENT ON COVID - 19

September 2020

COVID-19 threatens to push millions more people into poverty and deprivation across the world, risking reversing the progress made so far, towards reaching the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The World Bank estimates that 49 million more people will fall into extreme poverty with the number likely to rise to 100 million. <sup>1</sup>

As a convening of religious and faith-based actors working to end Extreme Poverty and Realize the Sustainable Development Goals, we are fearful of the unfolding crisis and alarmed that the global community must take every measure not only to counter the spread of COVID-19, but also to mitigate and reverse its economic and social impacts especially on the most vulnerable communities, particularly women, children and displaced people.

We note and are encouraged by other statements referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, issued recently; particularly the *Joint Statement by United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF) with the endorsement of the IATF Multi-Faith Advisory Council*<sup>2</sup>. We hold the view that it is our duty to champion the rights of those impacted by COVID-19 and call upon the global faith communities to hold to account governments and global institutions including the World Bank Group [WBG], in this regard.

As faith inspired actors with concern for population wide outcomes for wellbeing we are alarmed by the wide and multidimensional impact of COVID-19 and the prospect of deepening poverty and increasing the numbers of people living in extreme poverty. We note especially that:

- COVID-19 is negatively impacting investments in nutrition, quality health care, education and skills development, which are critical in ending extreme poverty.
- Huge populations in the global south are facing multiple vulnerabilities including the threat of increased hunger, undernourishment or malnutrition. This is due to both micro and macro level economic hardships; food insecurity and impact of climate change.
- A prolonged global recession will adversely impact the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank. 2020. *Global Economic Prospects, June 2020*. Washington, DC: World Bank. DOI: 10.1596/978-1-4648-1553-9. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO

<sup>2</sup><https://www.unaoc.org/2020/04/joint-statement-interagency-task-force-on-religion-and-sustainable-development/>

## OUR COMMITMENT

In light of the harsh realities on the most vulnerable parts of society, we the religious leaders and the faith-based organizations we represent, will champion the rights of the most vulnerable communities who have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and pledge to:

- Build on the work of religious actors responding to the COVID-19 pandemic including fostering greater collaboration among various faith actors, stakeholders, and decision makers towards addressing the pandemic and the overarching goal to end extreme poverty and realise the SDGs.<sup>3</sup>
- Advocate for policy that is inclusive, pro-poor, and which addresses the underlying root causes of conflict, fragility and poverty. These underlying dynamics include greed and waste, insensitivity to human suffering, abuse and dehumanizing treatment and mismanagement of the environment.
- Call on governments to ensure fiscal transparency and accountability, evidence informed decision making using reliable and accurate data and integrate children, youth and gender in national COVID-19 response plans.
- Build on the work of religious actors responding to COVID-19 and empower our communities to gather, document and share resultant evidence around good practices, desired outcomes and impacts of these faith-inspired actions to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19.
- Call on the WBG and governments to seize this moment by embracing a green inclusive recovery whilst leaving no one behind; lay emphasis on developing human capital and by creating enabling environments for sustainable development, equality social justice.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CALL TO ACTION

While acknowledging the numerous and multifaceted responses to the economic and humanitarian crisis created by COVID-19, there is clearly, however, a need to do more. A now obvious imperative is the need to work together to build resilient communities and invest in the three pillars of human capital — health, education and social protection. We call for solidarity and cooperation between the faith actors, multilaterals and governments to support the most vulnerable communities, particularly.

We recommend the following:

### Investing more in Health Systems

1. Invest in health systems that can deliver quality care, increase expenditure by governments on essential health care and preventative services for all including equitable distribution of vaccines, increase the capacity for disease surveillance and ability to

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<sup>3</sup> Faith and COVID-19 Resource Repository

contain outbreaks so that the human and economic costs are lessened, and in the context of the current pandemic focus on improving and equipping health facilities; valuing and respecting health workers by ensuring provision of personal protective equipment.

2. Support initiatives to achieve universal access to safe and affordable drinking water and adequate sanitation for all in order to slow down the spread of infection and improve the health of all people.
3. Ensure appropriate services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence including shelter, health care services; and accessibility of police and judicial systems.
4. Invest in and mainstream affordable psychosocial support and mental health services and ensure these services are accessible to the most vulnerable populations.

### **Investing more in Education**

5. Ring fence and implement policies and programmes aimed at raising access to and quality of education and ensuring all children, especially girls, are in school and have access to secondary and tertiary education, as well as continuing school-feeding programmes for children from low-income families.
6. Invest in skills development for the youth population and support them to improve and adapt their skills for entrepreneurship.
7. Embrace technological transformation and focus on investments in areas such as STEM, technical and vocational skills development and help youth realize their potential and to be ready to compete and thrive in a rapidly changing environment.
8. Invest in green research and link education policies to labor market outcomes, the future of work, and the creation of new green and sustainable job roles and suitably trained professionals to fulfil these roles.

### **Investing more in Social Protection, Economic Inclusion and Decent Jobs**

9. Implement policies to address the underlying factors perpetuating economic exclusion and fragile contexts and focus on reducing extreme poverty and inequality through private sector led and inclusive development.
10. Cushion low-income households through zero-rating or reducing taxes on essential foodstuffs, medical supplies and utilities, which would help those who might not benefit from the income tax reliefs due to their low wages as well as tax breaks, reliefs, holidays and rebates to enterprising youth.
11. Provide safety nets and relief to those performing jobs in precarious and informal sectors of the economy who lack employment insurance and access to health services while ensuring curfews and lockdowns are tolerable and limit the damage to livelihoods.
12. Support initiatives for ending hunger and implement policies to support food production for long-term food security by making investments in green technology that can improve sustainable agriculture productivity and the incomes of small-scale farmers.
13. Implement policies to decongest urban areas, provide affordable housing for informal settlements and urgently address poor urban infrastructures, overcrowded informal settlements and unregulated public transportation systems.
14. Prioritize the restoration of child services as lockdown measures wind down and ensure equal access for all children – including child refugees, forcibly displaced children,

children with disabilities, children without parental care and those living in charitable institutions.

15. Support growth that is inclusive and green and improve adaptation to climate change to help reduce economic, social and environmental risks.
16. Support local production and innovation and the revival of sectors that are labor intensive.
17. Reduce and restructure public debt and seek moratorium on debt servicing or debt cancellation by key creditor nations to free up resources and provide the budgetary flexibility in addressing the effects of the pandemic.

### **The Moral Imperative to End Extreme Poverty brings together diverse faith actors including:**

- ACT Alliance
- American Jewish Committee,
- American Jewish World Service,
- Anglican Alliance,
- Arigatou International,
- Auburn Seminary,
- Baha'i International Community,
- Bibliotheca Alexandria,
- Bread for the World,
- Buddhist Global Relief,
- Caritas Internationalis,
- Catholic Relief Services,
- Christian Aid,
- Christian Connections for International Health
- Christian Health Association of Kenya,
- Christian Journal for Global Health,
- Church World Service,
- Community of Protestant Churches of Europe,
- Congregation Agudas Achim,
- Congregation Netivot Shalom in Berkeley,
- Danmission,
- D. Min. Congregation B'nai Israel,
- EcoSikh,
- Episcopal Relief & Development,
- Food for the Hungry,
- Forum for Peace in Islamic Societies,
- General Board of Global Ministries-UMC.
- Global Interfaith WASH Alliance,
- IMA World Health,
- Indigenous People Ancestral Spiritual Council,
- Integrated Research Ltd,
- International Interfaith Peace Corps,
- Institute for Economics and Peace,
- Islamic Relief USA,
- Islamic Relief Worldwide, Society of North America,
- Jewish Community Chaplaincy & Rafael Spiritual
- Healing Center of Jewish Family Service of Colorado,
- Joint Distribution Committee,
- Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities,
- Milstein Center for Interreligious Dialogue,
- Muhammadiyah,
- Organization of African Instituted Churches,
- Orthodox Social Justice,
- Parliament of the World's Religions,
- Rabbinical Assembly,
- Religions For Peace,
- Religious Action Center,
- Rissho Kosei-Kai,
- Salvation Army,
- Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement,
- Sojourners,
- Swedish Mission Council,
- Temple Kol Emeth,
- The Charitable Foundation,
- The Institute for Economics and Peace,
- The Norwegian Mission Society,
- Uganda Muslim Supreme Council,
- Union for Reform Judaism,
- United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society,
- Universal Peace Federation,
- World Association for Christian Communication,
- World Council of Churches,
- World Evangelical Alliance,
- World Relief,
- Youth with a Mission Norway.