

**Statement to UN Human Rights Council 44<sup>th</sup> session (30 June-17 July 2020)****Item 3: Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women - COVID-19 and women's rights****A feminist and green recovery to the COVID-19 pandemic**

We are a world equipped to fight wars, not pandemics. Can we accept that? No. And this Council shouldn't either. Women peace activists are organising and advocating for alternatives.<sup>1</sup> We need a [feminist and green recovery](#) to this pandemic.

COVID19 lays bare systemic inequalities in our societies, particularly in communities affected by conflict and displacement. Daily reports of illness and mortality rates are shocking demonstrations of how gender, ethnicity, disability, age and class discrimination among others, have skewed access to human rights for the most vulnerable. In the words of the Philip Alston, former Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, *"Far from being the "great leveler," COVID-19 is a pandemic of poverty, exposing the parlous state of social safety nets for those on lower incomes or in poverty around the world."*<sup>2</sup>

For too long, States have neglected and underfunded critical infrastructure and public services, which would have helped respond to the pandemic. As Philip Alston has reminded this Council *"Endless pressures to promote fiscal consolidation, especially over the last decade, have pushed social protection systems closer towards nineteenth century models rather than late twentieth century aspirations."*<sup>3</sup> It is high time we redress that and for this Council to play its part.

All states must strengthen public services and live up to their obligations to respect, protect and promote human rights, including the rights to water, sanitation, food, housing and health. This is not only a matter of social justice but also a matter of conflict prevention.

Ever-increasing public spending in militarisation, including of the police and border controls, has diverted much-needed resources away from public services. Collectively, governments around the world are investing nearly [two trillion dollars](#) a year on militarism, at the expense of public health and every other aspect of social well-being. In 2019, the nine nuclear-armed states<sup>4</sup> spent nearly [73 billion](#) dollars on nuclear weapon systems. WILPF supports calls for a global ceasefire and we urge all states to divest from weapons, to disarm and demilitarise and to invest instead in human security based on human rights for all.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, across WILPF, women peace activists are supporting community actions including activities in support of a mother-child health care centre in DRC, internally displaced persons in Cameroon, women and girls with disabilities in Afghanistan, survivors of gender-based and domestic violence in Argentina, Nigeria and Kenya, and in support of homeless people and asylum seekers refugees in Italy.

<sup>2</sup> "The parlous state of poverty eradication," Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights to the 44<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council, UN Index: A/HRC/44/40, 2 July 2020, paragraph 34.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 36.

<sup>4</sup> China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States.

Madam President,

This panel is examining the gendered and intersectional consequences of the COVID19 pandemic. This is important but it is not enough; we must go beyond looking at consequences. Critically unveiling the structural causes of inequalities and redressing them should be a priority, if there is to be genuine and lasting change.

Both the environmental crisis and the pandemic have their roots in an unjust economic system. And the failures to contain them are also tied to systems of exclusions and inequality. Dealing with structural inequalities including racism, colonialism, patriarchy, militarism, and poverty resulting from neoliberal policies must go hand in hand with States' responses to COVID19 and the ensuing economic recession.

No robust nor gender-responsive post COVID-19 recovery will happen without sharing the collective burden of women's unpaid care work. Nor will it happen without ensuring quality, accessible social protection and universal public services such as water, sanitation and health services. Governments must dismantle corrupt, neoliberal and militarised economic systems and institutions. They must move beyond growth and GDP as a measure of progress. They must instead support and advance economic models and policies that are gender-responsive, based on human rights, environmental protection. And there has been [no shortage of human rights guidance](#) for governments that want their responses to COVID19 to be informed by human rights and gender justice.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, "COVID-19: No Excuses – A Human Rights-Based Response to COVID-19 is Imperative", WILPF, available at: <https://www.wilpf.org/no-excuses-a-human-rights-based-response-to-covid-19-is-imperative/>