



FEMINIST PRINCIPLES

**for an international
post-COVID-19
settlement**

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INTRODUCTION

FEMINIST PRINCIPLES FOR AN INTERNATIONAL POST-COVID-19 SETTLEMENT

In times of international crisis, it is hoped the United Nations—the ideals underpinning the Charter of the UN and the normative framework—would guide member states into committed and collaborative solutions. But painstaking efforts of regular, ordinary people to get their experience into the policy making fora and to push for change have been met with obstruction and betrayal by the political and economic elite of certain states that are the ostensible custodians of the system.

Where to now? How do we ensure that our common humanity transcends the restrictive formulaic nature of state sovereignty and enables real response, collaboration, and solidarity? How do we ensure such responses are devoid of profit motive, and guide us out not just of the pandemic but also, more importantly, the fault lines the pandemic has exposed in patriarchal and racist structures, defined by militarism, capitalism, and exploitation?

We need principles that can unite us in a common purpose. Five feminist international organisations consulted, discussed, and analysed information emanating from the grassroots to academia, in different contexts, continents, from national and international fora. They came up with these Feminist Principles and offered them to the UN General Assembly to guide its deliberations on a COVID-19 resolution. The member states have it; they use it, or they do not. What happens next is up to us.

Nothing is written in stone. Not the sovereignty of states, not even the Westphalian concept of the nation state. Not the structure of the UN and absolutely not the hegemony of UN Security Council. The world has changed—not just because of COVID-19, but because it exposed how we were, and are, and how new thinking and new approaches are needed.

The following are broad principles that provide the basis for this kind of new thinking. It presents key policy proposals and their associated contexts for a transformative process rooted in feminist principles. It identifies the failings, downfalls, and consequences of existing policies that prioritise profit over the health and well-being of people and communities—policies that, if unchanged, will only compound the grave immediate and long-term impacts of COVID-19, in particular the impact it has in distracting us from the biggest threat to the planet: environmental degradation and climate change.

This is a living document. No one has ownership of it and it must grow and evolve as we read and seek solutions. Every context is different, but the thematics remain the same, with a difference of degree in where priorities and emphasis lie. The principles of care, solidarity, and common humanity underpin each element. The need as a species to collaborate, to survive, and to eschew values of individualism, narcissism, and supremacy. Such approaches, which depend on power over others, have to be relegated to history as organising structures.

The mantra at the UN right now is ‘building back better’—but if we copy our existing structures, change will not happen. We need to build back differently to be better.

This is an invitation to be part of that. Take what is here, use it, contextualise it, work with all who are part of like-minded movements: we cannot have ceasefires without participation and principles for how to move out of conflicts and have peace; we cannot have peace if other forms of violence are not recognised and addressed. Violence will continue if gender roles remain binary and we are not allowed to thrive as who we are without culture and social norms defining us. None of us will be able to have real security unless we overturn the determinants of militarisation and capitalism as ways of thought and as foundational principles of our societies that organise our political economies as one 'greasing the palm' of the other to the detriment of people and planet.

In everything we do, in every way we can, let us use and develop what has been started in these pages, based as they are on the lived experiences of so many. Make it work to change our political economy, our gender relations, and to deconstruct our systems of oppression, in particular racism, colonialism, and patriarchy, linking it to economic and social justice and equality. Justice as a means towards transformation.

This is an invitation, basically, to accept the challenge of changing the world so as to save it.

SIX CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN FOR A FEMINIST POST-COVID-19 RECOVERY

FIRE demands that UN Member States take action on the following six critical areas of concern. Specific policy and process recommendations have been laid out in the pages that follow.

The six areas outlined in this document are not bureaucratic silos to be dealt with as separate issues; all have intersecting gender dynamics and causally shape one another. In response, there must be a conscious recognition of their inherent linkages to ensure relevance and impact.

CEASEFIRE

Ceasefires to enable a cooperative, international COVID-19 response must be seen as a first step toward permanent peace and disarmed security and must take into account the gendered impacts of conflict and the role of women in promoting peace.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Women-led action taken today to address the rise in gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, exacerbated by COVID-19 must guide and inform ongoing global strategies to enact a global “ceasefire” on gender-based violence.

HEALTH

Health is a basic human right and a prerequisite for the equal and sustainable development of our societies. The depletion of public health-care infrastructures, which has a disproportionate impact on women and has been accelerated by COVID-19, must be immediately reversed as part of our recovery efforts.

ENVIRONMENT

Action to address environmental degradation, climate change and the economic activities driving the destruction of our environment – all of which have led to the emergence of COVID-19 and are impacting our recovery from the pandemic – must be rooted in feminist perspectives of peace, equality, justice and solidarity.

ECONOMY

Transforming our economic system will enable a successful COVID-19 recovery, prepare our societies to respond to future challenges and advance equality, justice and the social and economic well-being of all people.

MILITARISM AND SECURITY

Divestment, disarmament and demilitarisation will promote equity, justice and human security while freeing up billions of dollars for investment into public, social and health infrastructure.

CEASEFIRE

Ceasefires to enable a cooperative, international COVID-19 response must be seen as a first step toward permanent peace and disarmed security and must take into account the gendered impacts of conflict and the role of women in promoting peace.

The Issue

For the millions of people throughout the world who are affected by armed conflict and violence, durable ceasefires to enable management and mitigation of COVID-19 and long-term human security remain an urgent priority.

Any work toward a global ceasefire, including in relation to General Assembly action on COVID-19, must be linked with its existing recognition of the gendered impacts of conflict, the importance and agency of women in promoting peace and the critical need for inclusivity and human security, as enshrined in the women, peace and security agenda.

Proposed Solutions

- **As called for by the Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, ensure full, effective and consequential participation of women and civil society** in the design, management, negotiation and monitoring of ceasefires and subsequent response, and of gender-sensitive mediation. For example, these diverse groups should be involved in discussions and decisions around priority outcomes of the ceasefire, such as pandemic response, humanitarian aid provision, disarmament processes and more.
- **Prioritise the social, economic, humanitarian and accountability rights and needs** of people in the countries affected by armed conflict, and not only the needs or requirements of parties directly involved in conflict.
- **Implement gender-sensitive, non-discriminatory and holistic humanitarian and medical assistance**, including sexual and reproductive health services, in all refugee and internationally displaced persons (IDP) camps. Examples include clinical treatment of rape, access to emergency contraception and safe termination of pregnancy and provision of psychosocial and legal services.

- **Include conflict-related gender-based violence in the definition of acts covered by a ceasefire** to ensure these acts are monitored alongside other potential violations of ceasefires and excluded from amnesty provisions.
- **Strengthen engagement** between local women-led civil society organisations and groups, the UN, government leaders and other relevant stakeholders following the initial ceasefire agreement, and set the stage for strengthening local decision-making bodies.
- **Support and fund civil society organisations**, particularly women-led organisations, peace-builders and those working on countering the COVID-19 pandemic and providing humanitarian relief with long-term, flexible and core funding, including through the reallocation of military expenditure. Funding that has already been provided to or earmarked for organisations undertaking human rights and humanitarian work unrelated to COVID-19 must not be redirected to the pandemic response, ensuring these organisations can continue delivering on their critical missions.
- **Ease, suspend or lift broad sectoral sanctions** in order to better enable full and unrestricted humanitarian access, including cross-border access, and to prevent further suffering among civilians. Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has reminded countries why this is so important given the potentially debilitating impact of sanctions on the health sector and human rights.²
- **Release people from prisons and detention facilities who have been detained without sufficient legal basis, including political prisoners**, for the immediate purpose of addressing unsanitary environments, preventing the spread of COVID-19 and freeing up resources for increased access to humanitarian and medical aid. This is also a step toward redressing the wrongs of politically-motivated or baseless detention. Importantly, this action is a confidence-building measure that will support the development of an environment of trust, within which longer ceasefires and transitions can be negotiated.
- **Prevent arms producers and exporters from selling weapons.** Users of weapons are not the only actors responsible for violence perpetrated in armed conflict. The companies that make these weapons, the governments that approve sales and transfers and the brokers that facilitate arms deals are also responsible and must be prevented from enabling their availability if a ceasefire is to be achieved.

² UN Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, “Bachelet calls for easing of sanctions to enable medical systems to fight COVID-19 and limit global contagion,” March 24, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25744&LangID=E>.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Women-led action taken today to address the rise in gender-based violence,³ particularly domestic violence, exacerbated by COVID-19 must guide and inform ongoing global strategies to enact a global “ceasefire” on gender-based violence.

The Issue

Even before the onset of COVID-19, rates of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, were reaching epidemic portions, with one in three women worldwide experiencing at least one instance of physical or sexual abuse in her lifetime.⁴ While all forms of gender-based violence have increased with the escalation of the pandemic, there has been a dramatic surge in domestic violence. It has become an epidemic within an epidemic.

Recognising this crisis, António Guterres, UN Secretary General, has called for a global “ceasefire” on domestic violence, lending high-level support to this long-standing demand.⁵ To have meaning, the Secretary General’s call must be coupled with action at the international level that looks to local women’s groups working on the frontlines of the crisis for leadership and consultation.

The emergency responses we enact now will influence and inform global strategies to address the rise in gender-based violence invariably triggered by crises – particularly domestic violence – while strengthening mechanisms to change the attitudes and policies that have made gender-based violence endemic in the lives of so many.

The approach to domestic violence must not be couched only in terms of “intimate partner violence”; it is much broader, manifesting in multiple and varied forms of abuse, and affects LGBTIQ+ persons, persons with disabilities, older persons and children. At its root and like all gender-based violence, domestic violence is a tool to enforce oppressive gender norms and gender inequality.

In all societies, cultural norms, laws and policies can either promote or discourage domestic violence, determine the interpretation of specific acts of violence and define whether they are prohibited. International law prohibits gender-based violence, including domestic violence. Policies and programs should seek to address harmful norms while providing prevention measures, direct services and access to justice for survivors.

As the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, governments and multilateral institutions should maintain transparency, act on their obligations, encourage civil society involvement and ensure access to national, regional and international systems of accountability.

3 For a legal definition of gender-based crimes under international law, see International Criminal Court, Office of the Prosecutor, Policy Paper on Sexual and Gender-Based Crimes, 3, 5, 12 (2014), <https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/otp/otp-policy-paper-on-sexual-and-gender-based-crimes--june-2014.pdf>.

4 World Health Organization, “Violence against women,” November 29, 2017, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>.

5 UN News, “UN chief calls for domestic violence ‘ceasefire’ amid ‘horrifying global surge’,” April 6, 2020, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>.

Proposed Solutions

- **Integrate domestic violence prevention messaging, information and resources into COVID-19 prevention materials** for distribution by healthcare providers, humanitarian aid workers and outreach workers and ensure those resources are provided in commonly spoken languages within different communities to enable broader outreach. While separate materials for COVID-19 prevention and domestic violence prevention may be appropriate in some situations, combining these messages can help reduce duplicate outreach efforts in the same communities, more effectively capitalise on the aid workers' reach and support efforts to identify survivors of domestic violence who are in need of medical or psychosocial services. Providing domestic violence prevention and outreach information together with COVID-19 prevention outreach materials also helps reduce the visibility of victim support information, making it less noticeable to abusers.
- **Fund services that are tailored to meet the needs of all persons vulnerable to domestic violence**, including women, persons with disabilities, children and youth, older persons and LGBTIQ+ and gender non-conforming persons. Outreach and prevention messaging should be designed to reach these populations and services should be accessible for vulnerable survivors and tailored to meet their specific needs. Programs should also include working with men as allies.
- **Recognise and address all forms of domestic violence, which dramatically increase during times of crisis.** If there are inconsistencies in the way domestic violence is recognised, conceptualised and measured, prevention measures will be ineffective in deterring increases in domestic violence during periods of crisis. "Honour" crimes, femicides, acid attacks, forced genital mutilation, early, forced and temporary marriage, physical violence, psychological and emotional violence, economic violence, withholding of medications and assistive devices, forced institutionalisation, reproductive violence and sexual violence, including marital rape, are among the many different forms of domestic violence.
- **Adopt comprehensive strategies to protect human rights defenders, with specific measures for women human rights and environmental defenders**, that account for the heightened risks they face in the COVID-19 context. Governments should also acknowledge and support the critical work of women human rights defenders and environmental defenders and ensure that COVID-19 emergency response measures are not used as a pretext to target or silence them. In addition, governments should promptly investigate any murders, attacks or threats against them.
- **Implement policies and programmes that address the root causes of gender-based violence** through the establishment of a comprehensive legal and policy framework to end gender-based violence. International law prohibits gender-based violence, including domestic violence, and policies and programmes must seek to address harmful cultural norms, laws and policies while providing prevention measures, direct services and access to justice for survivors.
- **Monitor resource distribution to marginalised communities.** Governments should also monitor and report on areas where COVID-19 responses are focused and ensure the equitable, timely and affordable distribution of medical, legal and psychosocial resources as well as water and sanitation, food, accurate information and other essential services necessary to ensure wellness and safety during the pandemic for individuals who are particularly at risk of domestic violence or other forms of gender-based violence. This includes ethnic and racial minorities, Indigenous peoples, refugees and asylum seekers, migrants, stateless people, people in war zones and other marginalised communities.

HEALTH

Health is a basic human right and a prerequisite for the equal and sustainable development of our societies. The depletion of public healthcare infrastructures, which has a disproportionate impact on women and has been accelerated by COVID-19, must be immediately reversed as part of our recovery efforts.

The Issue

Enjoying the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every human being. Yet according to the World Health Organization, at least half of the world's population does not have access to essential health services.⁶ Capitalism, particularly the neoliberal agenda, has pushed millions of people into poverty and depleted healthcare institutions of financial, material and human resources, making them unable to meet the challenges and pressures posed by COVID-19. In addition, health workers are often poorly paid and badly protected.

The depletion of public health has a disproportionate impact on women, who provide most of the informal care within families and whose care burden increases with the shrinking of public health resources. Women represent the majority of the health and care workforce. Preparedness

and response efforts to healthcare emergencies are also gendered,⁷ with women being largely left out of decision-making processes related to the outbreak despite their majority presence on the frontlines of care and resources being diverted from women's health services to the COVID-19 response.

We know that COVID-19 is neither the first nor the last pandemic humanity will face. Recognising that functional, affordable and accessible healthcare is a critical determinant of the well-being of individuals and of entire communities, and a prerequisite for the sustainable development and advancement of our societies, the depletion of public healthcare infrastructures must immediately be reversed as part of our recovery.

6 World Health Organization, "World Bank and WHO: Half of world lacks access to essential health services, 100 million still pushed into extreme poverty because of health expenses," December 13, 2017, <https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/13-12-2017-world-bank-and-who-half-the-world-lacks-access-to-essential-health-services-100-million-still-pushed-into-extreme-poverty-because-of-health-expenses>.

7 Clare Wenham, et. al., "COVID-19: the gendered impacts of the outbreak," *The Lancet*, March 14, 2020, [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30526-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30526-2/fulltext).

Proposed Solutions

- **Commit to achieving universal healthcare coverage for all.** As part of the COVID-19 recovery process, we must recognise health as critical and central to progress and development. Healthcare access must not be dependent on the economic status of individuals or states.
- **Invest in the immediate and long-term stability of healthcare systems.** This requires an immediate stop to austerity-driven reforms within the healthcare system and a reversal of their detrimental effects so far, and long-term planning and investment in health system infrastructure, labs, equipment and medical personnel (including education), as well as in water and sanitation.
- **Remove profit from healthcare.** The transformation of our healthcare systems from public interest institutions to businesses with decision-making and organisational structures typical of large-scale commercial enterprises must stop now. Our ability to recover from COVID-19 and prepare for the next global, or local, health crisis depends on the removal of profit from healthcare. Public health needs must be prioritised; medical personnel, healthcare infrastructure and decisions on the provision of healthcare cannot be driven by profit margins and personnel should be adequately paid and protected.
- **Ensure equal and just access to medicines.** Medicine, including life-saving medicine, is often unattainable for individuals with limited economic resources because large pharmaceutical companies hold monopolies and maintain high costs on medicine. Their research and development activities are driven by market incentive. As a result, development of and access to medicine are driven by profit, not by the public interest, creating unequal and unjust access to the right to health. Nationalised or regionalised medicine production and distribution channels of vaccines and other essential medicines are urgently needed to guarantee equal and just access within and between countries. In the interim, use the compulsory license to overcome the abuse of patents, trade secrets, know-how, cell lines, copyright, software, data and all other relevant intellectual property regarding COVID-19 treatments to the public domain to ensure widespread access to the medical tools and resources needed to diagnose and treat the virus as well as to prevent its spread.
- **Commit to protecting and increasing investments in local and global funding of science, innovation and technology related to health.** In the wake of a crisis, there is a tendency by governments to reduce funding for science, technology and innovation (STI) activities. At the same time, research shows that investments in STI are critical for the achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.⁸ We must globally commit to maintaining sustained funding of research in public health, preparedness, response and prevention. Priority must be given to public academic and research institutions, and to those projects that pledge just and equal access to findings and results to all countries.

⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *The Need to Protect Science, Technology and Innovation Funding During and After the COVID-19 Crisis*, May 28, 2020, https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/presspb2020d4_en.pdf.

ENVIRONMENT

Action to address environmental degradation, climate change and the economic activities driving the destruction of our environment – all of which have led to the emergence of COVID-19 and are impacting our recovery from the pandemic – must be rooted in feminist perspectives of peace, equality, justice and solidarity.

The Issue

Human-driven environmental degradation, climate change and a capitalist economic system that prioritises economic growth and profit above all else have made the emergence and spread of COVID-19 and other zoonotic viruses not only possible but also highly likely.

Our destructive environmental and economic activities are harmful to nature, to people and to animals. These activities include extractive industries, such as oil and gas, power dams, roadbuilding to support industrial transportation needs, deforestation, the invasion of tropical forests and wild landscapes, our treatment of animals and invasion of their habitats, the political economies of militarism and wars and the pollution in their wake, the industries that promote our excessive consumerism and our use of energy.

In response to COVID-19, a number of governments announced that they are lowering environmental standards, suspending environmental monitoring requirements, reducing environmental enforcement and restricting public participation. As UN human rights experts have stated, “these actions are irrational, irresponsible, and jeopardize the rights of vulnerable people.”⁹

Feminist perspectives on sustainable development are deeply ingrained in the idea of peace and are based on human dignity, eradication of poverty, equality and justice, full demilitarisation and solidarity within and between nations and peoples. Immediate and future action to address and reverse environmental degradation and the effects of climate change, which are closely linked with global health outcomes and our ability to recover from COVID-19, must be rooted in these principles.

Proposed Solutions

- **Invest in and provide stimulus for green energy sources.** The *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C* states that our global carbon dioxide emissions must be cut in half by 2030 and reach zero by 2050.¹⁰ These goals will not be achieved if we continue investing in dirty energy. We must design mechanisms that drastically reduce energy demand and make a shift toward clean energy sources, and this work must start now.

9 United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, “COVID-19: ‘Not an excuse’ to roll back environmental protection and enforcement, UN rights expert says,” April 15, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25794&LangID=E>.

10 International Panel on Climate Change, *Special Report: Global Warming of 1.5°C*, 2018, <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.

- **Reduce levels of energy use.** While investing in green energy sources is critical, our use of energy cannot remain at current levels. As we develop our green energy sources, countries must jointly conceptualise post-growth economies that are based on radical reduction of total energy and material use. The aim is to bring economies in line with planetary boundaries and equal distribution of income and resources, ultimately leading to improvements in the health, well-being and stability of people worldwide.
- **Factor in existing economic and political imbalance and inequality.** Our strategies for moving forward must reflect that countries emitting the most carbon dioxide are also the wealthiest. Collectively, they represent 86% of global emissions, while the world's poorest nations have contributed less than 1% while also being most vulnerable to climate change. Global policies necessary to reach the targets for global emissions must factor in the existing economic and political imbalance and inequality between countries, and include reparative mechanisms – for example, by prioritising investments in communities affected by climate change and by ensuring community control over new green energy projects.
- **Enforce robust legal frameworks on environmental protection.** As part of our recovery strategy, robust legal frameworks informed and guided by science must be in place for reduction of pollution and waste emissions; corporate accountability for environmental degradation; work on conserving biodiversity; banning profit-making from natural resources; and moving toward responsible use of resources within the realm of public and community needs.
- **Recognise the role colonialism has played in the destruction of the environment and the health and well-being of people and communities.** We must recognise the role colonialism has played in the destruction of the environment and the displacement and genocide of Indigenous populations and include in our strategies mechanisms that help to address these harms, starting with what some Indigenous activists have outlined in the Red Deal: Indigenous treaty rights, land restoration, sovereignty, self-determination, decolonisation and liberation.¹¹
- **Redistribute decision-making spaces and protect civil society spaces.** We must not only redistribute the resources but also the decision-making spaces, meaning that all people are included in the planning of our green and feminist future so that nobody is left behind. Recognising that challenges to effective civil society consultation are exacerbated by the pandemic, steps must be taken to support the right of all individuals and communities to information and effective and consequential participation. In so doing, States, international organisations and international financial institutions (IFIs) should make every effort to protect civil society, communities and human rights defenders against reprisals and restricted freedoms, and ensure that their COVID-19 response does not reduce the ability of people and communities to hold governments, IFIs and other actors accountable, now and in the future.
- **Recognise the devastating impacts of militarisation on the environment, both during periods of conflict and in peacetime, and leverage this knowledge to advance divestment, disarmament and demilitarisation efforts.** Militarised landscapes and resources, including weapons, machinery, transportation, permanent bases, conflict zones, live fire ranges and so on, directly contribute to environmental degradation through pollution of land, air and water, land clearing and use, the development and production of nuclear weapons, the production and dumping of massive volumes of hazardous waste, agricultural degradation due to landmines and much more.¹²

11 Nick Estes, "A Red Deal," *Jacobin*, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/08/red-deal-green-new-deal-ecosocialism-decolonization-indigenous-resistance-environment>.

12 International Peace Bureau, "The Military's Impact on the Environment," August 2002, <http://www.ipb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/briefing-paper.pdf>.

ECONOMY

Transforming our economic system will enable a successful COVID-19 recovery, prepare our societies to respond to future challenges and advance equality, justice and the social and economic well-being of all people.

The Issue

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the toxic effects of capitalism and neoliberalism. For far too long these systems have dominated every aspect of our lives: depleting our public services, turning the well-being of people, nature and animals into profit-driven businesses, hoarding profits at the expense of undervalued and underpaid workers, favouring profitability of a militarised world over human security and aggravating inequalities between people and countries.

These inequalities have a very concrete consequence on our ability to respond to COVID-19 effectively and to adhere to government measures to “wash our hands” (for many accessing water is a major issue in itself), to isolate, to work from home and to homeschool our children. Our inequalities also affect our ability to stockpile our shelves while in lockdown, to access and receive healthcare and to financially and psychologically recover from the pandemic. All of these circumstances are

influenced by class, gender, race/ethnicity, age and geography. As Philip Alston, the former Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty, rightly stated: “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.”¹³

The choice we now face – locally, regionally and globally – is whether we are going to use this unwanted opportunity to build societies that encourage solidarity, equality and caring for the environment and our fellow human beings. We must start by transforming our economic system and changing how we interact with each other and with the environment, as well as how we respond to crises. This will ensure we are not only addressing COVID-19 recovery but permanently transforming our societies so they are better prepared to prevent and respond to future challenges and to advance equality, justice and the social and economic well-being of all people.

¹³ Philip Alston, UN Human Rights Council, “The parlous state of poverty eradication,” July 2, 2020, <https://chrj.org/2020/07/05/philip-alston-condemns-failed-global-poverty-eradication-efforts/>.

Proposed Solutions

- **Stop our abusive relationship with nature and the environment and break the myth of infinite resources.** Substantial portions of the recovery packages directed at bailing out heavy industry must be redirected to boosting local production and circular economy based on restoration and regeneration, putting sustainability of the ecosystem at the centre. Strong commitments must be made to no-bail out programmes for heavy polluters; incentives for those who shift toward greener production; and reversing privatisation of natural resources, putting them under public control and public interest, guided by a symbiosis with nature. Long-term investment and funding redirection plans must be guided by gender and human rights impact assessments, and heavy regulations on gas and oil corporations must be introduced – including claiming public control over these resources if needed. Defunding and redirection of funds, including through demilitarisation programmes, should be made available for the creation of green jobs and social infrastructure.
- **Dismantle structures and norms that lead to women performing a disproportionate amount of informal care work, and support a shift toward universal care** – a principle of enduring social capacity and practice involving the nurturing, by all humans, of all that is necessary for the welfare and flourishing of human and non-human life.¹⁴ Policies and public investments into infrastructure must be enacted that will take the unpaid and undervalued social reproductive work out of the realm of the private and make it part of a collective effort. Mechanisms must be put in place that reduce and redistribute the hours spent by women on unpaid care work, in homes and in their communities. Governments must also prioritise the systematic introduction of gender-responsive budgeting into their planning and public service must be designed, funded, delivered and managed around gender equality commitments.
- **Radically transform how we evaluate the health of our economies and development of our countries.** Today we evaluate our economies based on indicators such as gross domestic product, instead of evaluating the ability of governments to provide for people's well-being. According to the International Monetary Fund, GDP is a “reference point for the health of national and global economies.”¹⁵ But measuring a nation's health by its GDP provides no context. GDP says nothing about how the “health” it captures is distributed, how well it takes care of our environment or how many of us benefit from the wealth produced by all of our work combined. It speaks even less about the possible costs of, and limits to, growth. Similarly, as Philip Alston states in his recent report to the UN Human Rights Commission, “focusing on the World Bank's flawed international poverty line facilitates greatly exaggerated claims about the impending eradication of extreme poverty.”¹⁶ The global community must radically transform how we measure health and development, looking beyond GDP and instead emphasising physical and mental health and the ability of countries to deliver well-being to people toward the realisation of the jointly agreed Sustainable Development Goals and beyond.

14 As defined by The Care Collective, “universal care” means that care is valued and shared equally among us, no longer tolerated as an exploited form of labour, shouldered mainly by women and the poor. It also means reinvigorating and radically deepening welfare states, creating alternatives to capitalist markets, and reversing the marketisation of care and care infrastructures.

15 Tim Callen, “Gross Domestic Product: An Economy's All,” International Monetary Fund, February 24, 2020, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/basics/gdp.htm>.

16 Philip Alston, UN Human Rights Council, “The parlous state of poverty eradication,” July 2, 2020, <https://chrj.org/2020/07/05/philip-alston-condemns-failed-global-poverty-eradication-efforts/>.

- **Strengthen the public sector and states' ability to protect economic, social and cultural rights.** Public interests must always be prioritised over private interests, including through legal safeguards against corporate capture of policy-making spaces. Bans must be introduced on profiteering from natural resources and governments must ensure that conditions and accessibility of public services are constantly improved. Strengthening the public sector and services also means that rights to housing, access to free education, universal healthcare coverage and clean air and water are not dependent on political trade-offs but constitutionally guaranteed. International financial institutions should ensure that their funds – during the pandemic and beyond – reach the most vulnerable and provide universal, equitable and gender-responsive access to essential services, including healthcare, food, housing, water, sanitation, education and sustainable livelihoods. This includes avoiding funding projects that harm the environment, displace people, threaten food security or weaken public services. Corporate entities and individuals should also be banned from media ownership to ensure the public's right to free, accessible and unbiased information.
- **Commit to making upfront investments in social infrastructure.** For decades we have defunded social and cultural infrastructure for the benefit of the profit-driven priorities of a wealthy few. As clearly demonstrated during the COVID-19 lockdown, public sector and community-based infrastructure plays a key role in community well-being. It can also play a key role in green use of resources and equal and just redistribution of these resources, as well as in provisioning of social and economic rights, justice and social and environmental well-being. Investments must be redirected from activities that are harmful to people and nature (e.g. military) and into infrastructure that provides community and individual care and well-being.

MILITARISM AND SECURITY

Divestment, disarmament and demilitarisation will promote equity, justice and human security while freeing up billions of dollars for investment into public, social and health infrastructure.

The Issue

We are a world equipped to fight wars, not pandemics. Collectively, governments around the world are investing nearly two trillion dollars each year on militarism at the expense of public health infrastructure, research and every other aspect of social well-being.¹⁷

We are spending more on militarism and weapons even though we know that people are fleeing from relentless bombing of their towns and cities, that the devastating radioactive violence of nuclear weapons lasts for generations, that domestic violence victims are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner if there is a gun in the home, that armed drones have killed thousands of civilians indiscriminately and that militarism only leads to more and more violence.

During COVID-19, despite risks to workers and the urgent need for medical equipment and protective gear, arms production has continued unabated by either the pandemic or the UN Secretary General's ceasefire appeal. Arms manufacturers have been treated as essential services in most major weapons-producing countries.

Weapons cost lives through their use, but also through their production. The Global Campaign on Military Spending has shown that one F-35 joint strike fighter aircraft could pay for 3,244 intensive care unit beds, or that one submarine could pay for over 9,000 fully-equipped ambulances.¹⁸ We know that more jobs could be created through investments in a Green New Deal and a Red Deal¹⁹ than are currently created by military spending, and that such investments would help us mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the climate crisis and improve the lives of billions of people around the world.

Defunding military budgets will free up billions of dollars that can be invested immediately and over the long term in healthcare, employment and wages, housing, education, food, shelter and other public infrastructure needs during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. Disarmament will help increase human security globally, opening space for cooperation and dialogue instead of violence and war.

Ending war profiteering and abolishing militaries will transform our world by profoundly advancing sustainable peace solutions.

17 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Global military expenditure sees largest annual increase in a decade—says SIPRI—reaching \$1917 billion in 2019," April 27, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2020/global-military-expenditure-sees-largest-annual-increase-decade-says-sipri-reaching-1917-billion>.

18 Global Campaign on Military Spending, "'GDAMS Healthcare Not Warfare Infographic (Updated)," May 2020, <http://demilitarize.org/resources/gdams-healthcare-not-warfare-infographic/>.

19 Phyllis Bennis, "A Green New Deal Needs to Fight US Militarism," Jacobin, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/05/green-new-deal-fight-militarism-imperialism>.

Proposed Solutions

- **Commit to cutting military spending.** Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the Soviet Union, has called for an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly to revise the “entire global agenda,” including by committing states to cut military spending by up to 15%.²⁰ But when we consider that nuclear weapon maintenance and modernisation programmes are going to cost over \$1 trillion,²¹ or when we consider the single unit prices of jet fighters, battle tanks and submarines, we can clearly see a much greater cut is not only possible but absolutely necessary.
- **Commit to taking over the UN Security Council’s mandate** (which it has not fulfilled) in Article 26 of the UN Charter to create a plan for regulating armaments and reducing military spending, including by agreeing to a concrete programme for military divestment, demilitarisation and disarmament.
- **States need to hold each other accountable for their commitments** as part of this project of divestment, demilitarisation and disarmament. Interim measures could include, for example, the establishment of an international monitoring body to track investments in weapons production and purchase, profits from sale and trade, with the objective of imposing taxes or other penalties for crossing agreed thresholds. The funds from this system of taxation could be deployed to assist with disarmament programmes, to retool arms production facilities to other socially progressive purposes and for disarmament and demilitarisation education.
- **Stop arms production and convert facilities** to produce goods for social and environmental well-being.
- **Stop arms transfers** that violate the international Arms Trade Treaty and other regional and national commitments, which provide fuel to ongoing conflicts or prevent conflict settlement and cause harm and human rights violations.
- **Divest government funds** from corporations that produce weapons and redirect public funds from weapons and war toward the production of medical equipment, medical staff and provision of wages, rents, food and healthcare of those suffering from the economic impacts of COVID-19.
- **End the conditionalities in official development assistance** that require receiving governments to invest in military, security and police structures, training and weapons.
- **Sign, ratify and implement** the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Arms Trade Treaty, the Convention on Cluster Munitions, the Mine Ban Treaty, the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, the Non-Proliferation Treaty and other instruments prohibiting weapons, and work for new instruments, such as a treaty prohibiting autonomous weapon systems.
- **Demand the nine nuclear-armed states cease their nuclear weapon modernisation programmes** and reallocate the resources to human and environmental needs.
- **Support the development of a political declaration** against the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, which will help prevent the destruction of hospitals and medical centres, as well as homes, schools, markets, water and sanitation facilities and other critical civilian infrastructure.

20 Mikhail Gorbachev, “Mikhail Gorbachev: When The Pandemic Is Over, The World Must Come Together,” *Center for Citizen Initiatives*, April 20, 2020, <https://ccisf.org/mikhail-gorbachev-when-the-pandemic-is-over-the-world-must-come-together/#more-5008>.

21 Reaching Critical Will, “Assuring destruction forever: 2020 edition,” June 2020, <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/resources/publications-and-research/publications/14711-assuring-destruction-forever-2020-edition>.

- **Demand the closure of foreign military bases** and the end of joint military exercises around the world, both of which contribute to the spread of COVID-19, exacerbate geopolitical tensions and the risks of conflict and lead to violence against local populations, including sexual- and gender-based violence.
- **Enhance cooperation among the UN and other international mechanisms**, including those related to disarmament, human rights and women, peace and security.
- **Commit to end programmes that result in militarisation** of police and borders.
- **Urge national and local governments to stop the spread of the digital panopticon** through surveillance, facial recognition, the use of algorithms for policing and detention, etc. This can include maintaining or developing prohibitions on the deployment and use of drones for surveillance and violence, prohibiting autonomous weapon systems and preventing other technologies that will seek to automate violence.