



THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

1 June 2020

Dear Acting Administrator Barsa,

I thank you for your letter dated 18 May 2020, addressing the response of the United Nations system to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its related consequences.

At the outset, I extend my gratitude to the United States of America for its continued generosity, partnership and commitment to the United Nations and the goals and ideals of its Charter. USAID, in particular, is an essential partner in lifting millions of people across the world out of poverty and dire circumstances, while advancing human dignity. Working together we can make a critical difference in saving lives and livelihoods, reducing suffering, and overcoming the extraordinary challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The tremendous support of the United States, a global leader in humanitarian assistance, is paramount at a time when the most vulnerable people in the world, who had already been experiencing incredibly challenging circumstances, are now facing the added threat of this pandemic.

In order to support Member States and the people we serve, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners developed the Global Humanitarian Response Plan (Global HRP) to analyse and respond to both the direct public health consequences, as well as the indirect immediate humanitarian consequences of the pandemic, with particular regard to people in countries already facing other humanitarian crises. We continue to collaboratively work with urgency to prevent the ruinous effects of worsening food insecurity and the risk of future famines, as well as to reduce the impacts of the pandemic on access to, and delivery of, health services.

The Honorable John Barsa  
Acting Administrator  
United States Agency for International  
Development  
Washington, D.C.

Health is a part of our overall humanitarian response and is especially critical in the context of the current pandemic, where national health systems are already weakened and overstretched. It is estimated that 60 per cent of preventable maternal deaths occur in humanitarian crises and in fragile settings. In 2017, there were about 295,000 maternal deaths globally. Of these, about 73 per cent, or 215,000, were in the 63 countries covered by the Global HRP. This amounts to 590 deaths per day. The Global HRP provides help and protection that prioritizes the most vulnerable, which includes women and girls, given that pandemics heighten existing levels of discrimination, inequality and gender-based violence. The critical support under the Global HRP includes provision for life-saving primary health care, antenatal, safe delivery, and postnatal care, without which millions of women and children would die or suffer disabilities during pregnancy and childbirth.


This critical support also helps prevent and protect individuals from sexually transmitted infections and HIV, including preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV. Furthermore, it addresses the needs of survivors of gender-based violence, particularly at a time where we are witnessing a rise in such violence against women and girls in the face of COVID-19. Without this health care, millions more would suffer or die.

In providing this support, and in accordance with its Charter, the United Nations does not intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State. Thus, health care is provided with full respect to national laws. It does not promote, much less impose, abortion on anyone, nor is it intended to do so. The Global HRP complements and supports existing government responses and national coordination mechanisms, with due consideration paid to respecting humanitarian principles.

If we do not support the poorest people – especially women and girls and other vulnerable groups – as they battle the pandemic and impacts of the global recession, we will all be confronting the spillover effects for many years to come.

Once again, I thank you for your continued support and wish you good health in these trying times.

Yours sincerely,

with my warmest personal  
regards  


António Guterres