



United Nations Secretary-General

Berlin, Germany

25 October 2020

Secretary-General's video message for the World Health Summit

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest crisis of our age.

Just seven months since it was declared, over 1 million people have died, and tens of millions have been infected.

Cases are still rising, and new spikes and waves are occurring in places that had suppressed the virus for many months.

The indirect impact of the pandemic is wreaking havoc on societies and economies. Travel restrictions and lockdowns have resulted in the loss of 500 million jobs so far and are costing the global economy some \$375 billion every month.

Reports of gender-based violence are skyrocketing.

Mental illness is a crisis within a crisis.

Deaths from other health conditions are likely to increase, as resources are redirected towards COVID-19.

Some 24 million children could drop out of school, with lifelong impact.

COVID-19 is driving us even farther off-course from achieving the vision and promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

The first hard lesson of this crisis is that we were not prepared.

Global health and emergency response systems have been tested, and found wanting.

Access to health is a human right denied to billions of people around the world.

Universal Health Coverage is the path to high-quality, equitable, affordable healthcare. Strong public health systems and emergency preparedness are essential steps to greater resilience.

All countries have signed up to Universal Health Coverage by 2030. But we cannot wait ten years.

We need health systems that work, before we face an outbreak of something more contagious than COVID-19; more deadly; or both.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The second lesson is that we are not powerless. If we follow the science, and demonstrate unity and solidarity, we can overcome the pandemic.

Public health measures including masks, physical distancing and hand washing, are proven means of keeping the virus at bay.

We need to protect the vulnerable – older people and those with pre-existing conditions. We must stop holding and attending events that amplify the spread of the virus; and we must work with communities on sharing information and building trust.

Numerous governments have demonstrated that taking targeted, local measures immediately outbreaks occur can stamp them out.

At the same time, we must persevere with comprehensive public health measures that the World Health Organization identified on Day One: find, isolate, test and care for cases, and trace and quarantine their contacts.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Third, we need global solidarity every step of the way.

Developed countries must support health systems in countries that are short of resources.

And we must join together as governments, the private sector, civil society and all partners, to make sure vaccines, tests and treatments are available to everyone, everywhere. A vaccine must be a global public good.

Fully funding the ACT-Accelerator is the fastest way to end the pandemic.

Vaccines, tests and therapies are more than life savers.

They are economy savers and society savers.

There is no choice between saving people's lives and saving jobs. Protecting people from the virus is the best way to keep schools open and businesses running. It will prevent the virus from spreading even more widely and returning in wave after wave.

But as I have said before, there is no panacea during a pandemic.

Relief will come not through one single step, but through smartly combining cutting-edge research with basic public health.

Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

The fourth lesson is that misinformation and disinformation are deadly allies of the virus. They are contributing to deaths and infections, and to social tensions that have led to violence.

Unless we counter rumours, conspiracy theories and lies, they will negate our other efforts.

The United Nations 'Verified' campaign aims to ensure people have access to accurate advice that protects and promotes health.

I welcome efforts by social media platforms and others to prevent the spread of false stories and advice, and promote scientific, fact-based analysis – although more needs to be done.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The World Health Summit and the M8 Alliance are important platforms to champion and work together for global health.

This gathering, bringing together science, politics, business and civil society, is the place to build new partnerships, share best practices and take decisions that could save lives.

Let us use this opportunity to confront the COVID-19 crisis together, with the urgency and integrity it requires.

Thank you.