WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER:
HUMAN RIGHTS AND COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY
New York, April 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency — but it is far more.

It is an economic crisis. A social crisis. And a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis.

In February, I launched a Call to Action to put human dignity and the promise of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the core of our work.

As I said then, human rights cannot be an afterthought in times of crisis — and we now face the biggest international crisis in generations.

Today, I am releasing a report highlighting how human rights can and must guide COVID-19 response and recovery.

The message is clear: People — and their rights — must be front and centre.

A human rights lens puts everyone in the picture and ensures that no one is left behind.

Human rights responses can help beat the pandemic, putting a focus on the imperative of healthcare for everyone.
But they also serve as an essential warning system — highlighting who is suffering most, why, and what can be done about it.

We have seen how the virus does not discriminate, but its impacts do — exposing deep weaknesses in the delivery of public services and structural inequalities that impede access to them. We must make sure they are properly addressed in the response.

We see the disproportionate effects on certain communities, the rise of hate speech, the targeting of vulnerable groups, and the risks of heavy-handed security responses undermining the health response.

Against the background of rising ethno-nationalism, populism, authoritarianism and a pushback against human rights in some countries, the crisis can provide a pretext to adopt repressive measures for purposes unrelated to the pandemic.

This is unacceptable.

More than ever, governments must be transparent, responsive and accountable. Civic space and press freedom are critical. Civil society organizations and the private sector have essential roles to play.

And in all we do, let’s never forget: The threat is the virus, not people.

We must ensure that any emergency measures — including states of emergency — are legal, proportionate, necessary and non-discriminatory, have a specific focus and duration, and take the least intrusive approach possible to protect public health.

The best response is one that responds proportionately to immediate threats while protecting human rights and the rule of law.

Looking ahead, we need to build back better. The Sustainable Development Goals — which are underpinned by human rights — provide the framework for more inclusive and sustainable economies and societies.

Strengthening economic and social rights bolsters resilience for the long haul.
The recovery must also respect the rights of future generations, enhancing climate action aiming at carbon neutrality by 2050 and protecting biodiversity.

We are all in this together.

The virus threatens everyone. Human rights uplift everyone.

By respecting human rights in this time of crisis, we will build more effective and inclusive solutions for the emergency of today and the recovery for tomorrow.

Thank you.

Video Link:

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United Nations
SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
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MESSAGE ON THE BEGINNING OF RAMADAN

I extend my warmest wishes as millions of Muslims around the world begin observing the holy month of Ramadan.

This will, of course, be a very different Ramadan. Many community activities will naturally be affected by measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, many people in conflict zones will once again be tragically marking this month with war and insecurity all around.

I recently called for an immediate global ceasefire to focus on our common enemy — the virus. I repeat that appeal today, recalling the words of the Holy Quran “and if they incline to peace, then incline to it”.

E-mail: unic.islamabad@unic.org. Web: www.unic.org.pk
Ramadan is also about supporting the most vulnerable. I thank governments and people throughout the Muslim world who live by their faith, supporting those fleeing conflict in the best Islamic tradition of hospitality and generosity — a remarkable lesson in this world where so many doors have been closed to those in need of protection, even before COVID-19.

Once again, my best wishes to all for mercy, solidarity and compassion in these trying times.

Ramadan Kareem.

Video Link: