Forum: 1st Committee (Human Rights)

Issue: Protection of human rights in the coronavirus pandemic

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Introduction

The impact of global coronavirus pandemic on humanity is one of the most pressing issues at the present stage. The entire world is facing a phenomenal crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on people's lives - millions of civilian populations are suffering. Rigorous measures were implemented in order to slow transmission of the virus, ultimately resulting in a restriction to health care, food, water, sanitation, work, education.

The international dimensions of human rights are particularly relevant in the light of the pandemic. The virus clearly requires a collaborative force and worldwide coherence. Recognizing that states have different resources and norms, human rights laws and guidance might ensure a basis for assessing how well governments' measures promote people's human rights during challenging times.

Five core human rights principles are notably relevant to pandemic responses: equality and non-discrimination, participation, stability, human decency and care, and the rights to liberty of expression and availability of information.

The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating existing human rights violations, therefore it is essential to avert the precise issue concerning people's rights during coronavirus occurrence.

Definition of key terms

Coronavirus - a large family of viruses transmitted between animals and people that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more high burden diseases.

<u>Pandemic</u> - epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across a large region, for instance multiple continents or worldwide; widespread illness around the world.

<u>Discrimination</u> - unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, etc.

<u>Clinical trial</u> - research experiments on human participants designed to answer questions about new treatments.

<u>Stigma</u> - the negative association between a person or group of people who share certain characteristics and a specific disease, which may mean people are labelled, stereotyped, discriminated against, treated separately, and/or experience loss of status because of a perceived link to a disease.

Background information

As the COVID-19 pandemic has swept across the globe, it has touched all 7.8 billion individuals to some extent. Extensive public health campaigns, restrictions on freedom of movement and social interaction, and targeted economic stimulus packages are just a few of these steps.

The novel human coronavirus disease COVID-19 has become the fifth documented pandemic since the 1918 flu pandemic. COVID-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China, in late December 2019.

The World Health Organization temporarily termed the new virus 2019 novel coronavirus on 12 January 2020 and then officially named this infectious disease as 'coronavirus disease 2019' on 12 February 2020. After originally emerging in China, the COVID-19 virus had been evolving for four months and swiftly spread to other countries worldwide as a big threat across the globe. On 11 March 2020, the WHO finally published the analysis that COVID-19 can be characterized as a pandemic, following 1918 Spanish flu, 1957 Asian flu, 1968 Hong Kong flu and 2009 Pandemic flu, which caused an estimated 50 million, 1.5 million, 1 million, and 300,000 human deaths.

Coronavirus is definitely a public health emergency. History has shown that public health emergencies often lead to stigma and discrimination towards certain communities and groups or affected persons. Within the context of COVID-19, this has

already manifested with the disease being associated with a specific population or nationality.

Stigma and discrimination have also been directed at persons diagnosed with COVID-19, at people of Asian descent or who have traveled to affected countries. Even emergency responders and healthcare professionals have been targeted as statistics indicate.

Furthermore, the impact of COVID-19 on women is important. Women may not find it easy to work from home because in many societies they are expected to bear a disproportionately large workload at home. This includes caring for children and the elderly, cooking, and performing other household chores, which their partners may be unwilling to perform.

It is already evident that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts the poor, in part because they lack the resources to take proper aprecautions.

Coronavirus pandemic has shown that in addition to the right to health and life, other important rights, including the rights to equality, livelihood, safety, security, housing and food, are also at stake.

According to the United Nations report 'COVID-19 and Human Rights', extraordinary measures taken by most of the countries in the world, for example, *"Extensive lockdowns, adopted to slow transmission of the virus, restrict by necessity freedom of movement and, in the process, freedom to enjoy many other human rights Such measures can inadvertently affect people's livelihoods and security, their access to health care (not only for COVID-19), to food, water and sanitation, work, education – as well as to leisure. Measures need to be taken to mitigate any such unintended consequences'.* The health crisis caused by the pandemic leads to social and economic crisis since the existing economic relations between countries have been heavily damaged.

The United Nations report outlines, among others, the following problems caused by the pandemic:

- Widespread closure of schools has interrupted the education of more than 1 billion children;
- Reduction of care and protection services for children, including abrupt closure of care institutions and health services serving children, has increased children's vulnerability to violence, exploitation and abuse;

- Women confined at home with abusers, without access to harm reduction services and shelters, are at greater risk of domestic violence, and rates of violence in the home are escalating; *etc.*

Major countries and organizations involved

<u>The United Nations</u>
In May 2020 the UN Secretary-General issued a policy brief highlighting how human rights are critical to shaping pandemic response, as they put people "centre-stage" while also preserving human dignity.

<u>International Labour Organization</u>
The International Labour Organization maintains a system of international labour standards (ILS) aimed at promoting opportunities for all to obtain decent and productive work, in conditions of freedom, equity, security.

<u>World Health Organization (WHO)</u>
The specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health. The WHO Constitution, which establishes the agency's governing structure and principles, states its main objective as "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health."

Relevant treaties and UN resolutions

- 2 April, 2020 - Global solidarity to fight the **coronavirus** disease 2019 (**COVID-**19)

- 20 April, 2020 - International cooperation to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face **COVID**-19

- 5 November, 2020 - Special session of the General Assembly in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

- 16 December, 2020 - Women and girls and the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

- 16 December, 2020 - Strengthening national and international rapid response to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on women and girls

Possible solutions

The issue of protecting human rights in the time of pandemic may be discussed and resolved by the course of successive points:

- ➢ Provide that international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law and standards are at the center of all COVID-19 responses;

- ➢ Ensure income security and targeted social assistance for the most marginalized or vulnerable;

- ➢ Ensure that national and local response and recovery plans identify and put in place targeted measures to address the disproportionate impact of the virus on certain groups and individuals;

- ➢ Use maximum available resources at national and international levels to ensure availability, accessibility and quality of health care;

- ➢ Take measures to alleviate the situation of vulnerable groups, including migrants and refugees.

Useful links

https://www.un.org/victimsofterrorism/sites/www.un.org.victimsofterrorism/files/un_-_human_rights_and_covid_april_2020.pdf

https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621037/dp-covid-19-human-rights-principles-070820-advance-en.pdf?sequence=4

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_issues_related_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic

https://www.un.org/victimsofterrorism/sites/www.un.org.victimsofterrorism/files/un_-_human_rights_and_covid_april_2020.pdf