



R o y a u m e d e B e l g i q u e

Intervention de S.E. Monsieur Marc Pecsteen de Buytswerve,
Ambassadeur, Représentant permanent

Au Conseil de sécurité des Nations Unies

**High-level Open Debate of the UN Security Council on
“Pandemics and Security”**

New York, le 2 juillet 2020

Thank you, M. President, for calling the Council’s attention on the issue of intertwined global health and security risks and for inviting our distinguished briefers to share their insights on this matter.

At the outset, let me commend the unanimous adoption of the COVID-19 resolution yesterday and congratulate France and Tunisia for their efforts. It took a long time, by in the end, France and Tunisia’s perseverance has paid off.

We share your concerns about the implications of global health risks for international peace and security. They can indeed be a **threat multiplier in fragile or conflict situations and can undermine conflict prevention as well as conflict resolution and peace building efforts.**

When health care workers and facilities are regularly attacked during armed conflict, the **very fabric of the health system is under attack , and as such left ill-equipped to respond to a pandemic or global health crisis.** The situation in Syria is unfortunately one of the best examples: 9 years of war have taken an extreme toll. Nearly half of all health care facilities have been severely damaged or destroyed. WHO has counted almost 500 attacks on health care workers and installations in the last 3 years. It has left thousands of IDP’s in the region without access to any medical care. **Health care in Syria needs our support** and the renewal of the cross-border resolution is a key step toward that goal.

The protection of health care and health workers in conflict situations, as this Council agreed to in resolution 2286, needs our renewed attention indeed. Impunity for violations of international humanitarian law needs to end.

As COVID-19 data is already showing us, a pandemic, in turn, further decimates this health care system. Hate speech, stigmatisation, fake news and even sometimes coercion are further fueling violence against health care workers. Vaccination campaigns are being interrupted and services like sexual and reproductive health care are being deprioritized. Past epidemics have shown the toll of such a deprioritizing : maternal mortality increased by 75% in West-Africa during the ebola epidemic of 2014-2016.

Previous experiences with ebola outbreaks (in the DRC for example) have also demonstrated **how mistrust and misinformation undermine not only an effective response to Ebola, but also community engagement and conflict resolution efforts.** Armed groups often use the gaps left by the health crisis to

expand their grip over populations. Without trust of the population, a health system will not work, nor will the response and measures enforced to combat a pandemic, nor will any humanitarian or peacebuilding effort. All measures taken in such fragile contexts should therefore be conflict-sensitive and context-based, in order to avoid fueling grievances which could lead to further tensions.

Covid-19 has further demonstrated the **far-reaching effects of a pandemic on the operational capacity of UN peace operations**, which have had to adapt their operations to help prevent the spread of the virus. The pandemic has impacted mobility of personnel and engagement with local communities. There will be a time to analyse and draw lessons from these experiences and to incorporate them into the work of UN peace operations. The Military Staff Committee and the C34 would greatly benefit from such an analysis.

Mr President,

Belgium supports WHO in its leading role of the comprehensive health response and has contributed to the response and the search for a vaccine. We are supporting medical evacuations of UN and UN peace operations personnel. The EU and its Member States have spared no efforts: under the “Team Europe” approach, we have mobilized over 36 billion EUR, for the global COVID-19 response and recovery.

But as we know, COVID-19 is not just a health nor just a humanitarian crisis. It is an economic crisis, it is a security crisis, it is a protection and a human rights crisis. The consequences of these combined shocks can fuel existing tensions and undermine conflict prevention and conflict resolution as well as peacebuilding efforts.

To fight these multiple crises, a coordinated global response supported by multilateral efforts, is needed. Belgium fully agrees with the Secretary-General that coming out of this crisis will require a whole-of-society, whole-of-government and whole-of-the world approach.