

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

**Open briefing to the Security Council
on equitable access to vaccines in contexts
affected by conflict and insecurity**

New York, 17 February 2021

Mr President,

Over recent months, we have witnessed unprecedented needs and challenges. In addition to the dramatic socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis, this crisis has once again demonstrated the price to be paid for under-financed and under-prioritised public health services. The vaccination campaigns are disrupted, putting at least 80 million children in danger of diseases and death. Furthermore, mistrust and disinformation are undermining the effectiveness of the response and recently launched vaccination campaigns. We are seeing hate speech, stigmatisation and fake news that fuel violence against civilians and healthcare workers. Armed groups are profiting from vacuums left by the health crisis to extend their hold over populations. The pandemic has highlighted challenges around the world and exacerbated inequalities, fragility and the human cost of conflict.

The coronavirus vaccine must be seen as a **global public good**. Belgium is in favour of **equitable access to vaccines for all, by supporting the COVAX facility**. So far, the European Union and its Member States have donated 853 million euros, making the EU one of COVAX's largest donors. Belgium has also made a direct contribution of its own of 4 million euros in 2021, thus contributing to access to vaccines in the 92 low and middle income countries participating in COVAX. Indeed, COVAX is the only global initiative that is working with governments and manufacturers to ensure that the COVID-19 vaccines are available worldwide, including in armed conflict areas.

And it is in these conflict situations in particular, that the Security Council has an important role to play. Access to vaccines can never be considered equitable as long as the civilian populations in conflict areas are deprived of them, for ill-conceived reasons which only serve the narrow interests of the authorities or armed groups in power. It falls under the Council's responsibility to protect the international peace and stability to guarantee access to the civilian populations in conflict areas; to ensure the protection of aid and medical workers, against both physical and fake news attacks; and that it ends the attacks on health facilities as have been seen in Syria and against healthcare in general.

The Council could once again call for a global cease fire, as it did in its resolution 2532, or it could grant it another monitoring. The Council could empower the peacekeeping missions more structurally for the distribution of vaccines, by adapting their mandates to such a task. The Council could even impose measures against actors who seek to obstruct the rapid and reliable delivery of vaccines. In any event, the Council must not exclude the consideration of any means available to it to ensure the welfare of civilian populations in armed conflict areas.

Today's world, weakened by the COVID crisis, cannot afford geostrategic divisions. This is a crisis at all levels of our existence. This is a health and humanitarian crisis. This is an economic crisis, a security crisis, a hunger crisis, a protection crisis and a crisis for human rights. Only a coordinated global response can combat these multiple crises. These challenges only demonstrate that more needs to be done and we must act together. Belgium stands ready to take on its responsibilities to this end.

This is why, Mr President, we sharing your concerns about the implications of inequitable access to the COVID-19 vaccine for the already fragile world peace and stability.

So, we fully support the **leadership of the Secretary General** and the other initiatives in dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Secretary General has said: **vaccinationalism** is toxic because none of us is safe until all of us are safe. Global solidarity is equal to personal interest. Belgium is convinced that the only way to combat the virus and its new strains is through multilateral cooperation based on the "leave no one behind" approach.