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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Joint written statement* submitted by African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies, Centre du Commerce International pour le Développement., Rencontre Africaine pour la defense des droits de l'homme, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Human Rights and Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) and the Pan-African Forum on Rights and Development (PAFRD), together with Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'homme (RADDHO) and Centre du Commerce International Pour le Développement (CECIDE) are deeply concerned about the growing spread of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and wish to express our solidarity with its victims worldwide. This highly contagious and deadly disease spares no region of the world and its victims are expected to reach several millions in terms of fatalities and medically impaired survivors.

We fully support the joint call of the United Nations (UN) Secretary General and the Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO) for effective international cooperation and solidarity to contain the spread of this pandemic which is "... a threat to all of humanity."¹ In this respect, we call on all states to continue unconditional cooperation and without exclusion of any country or region. We further fully reject any attempts for politicisation of the international response to this crisis. It is equally important that COVID-19 pandemic should not be used as a pretext to undermine gains in freedom of expression, the right to freedom of demonstration and association and assembly. At this critical time, it is crucial that the world community pays more attention to the most vulnerable groups and people such as the disabled, elderly, migrants, prisoners, refugees and internally displaced persons, indigenous peoples and minorities.

With the growing increase of infection rates in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, South America and South-east Asia, then the epicentre of COVID-19 is gradually shifting from the developed countries of Western Europe and North America to the global south, which is a bastion of extreme poverty and weak health and social service sectors. In addition to its ponderous toll on human lives, the pandemic is expected to impact heavily on the international economy with disproportionate burden and stress shouldered by the poor developing countries, both in term of the collapse of their economic and health systems and ultimately the overall well-being of their citizens, especially the downtrodden and vulnerable segments of societies.

Evidence suggest that the impact of COVID-19 on the poor and marginalized communities both in developed and developing countries is devastating. This is because such communities are often exposed to hazardous work and living conditions, deprived of quality medical and sanitary service and consequently they are disproportionately victimized by the widespread of COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in the United States of America (USA) sharp disparities were observed in the numbers of victims among the rich and poor segments of the society, especially African-Americans and other minorities. According to Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights "poor communities in the United States are being hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government must urgently take additional steps to prevent tens of millions of middle-class Americans from being plunged into poverty."² The international expert added that: "Communities of color, who face a persistent racial wealth gap, are at particular risk and are dying at much higher rates."³

The overall impact of COVID-19 on the socio-economic well-being and economic growth, especially in the poor developing countries is expected to be quite significant with economic recession threatening many countries. According to the World Bank's June 2020 Global Economic Prospects report,⁴ COVID-19 could push up to 71 million people into extreme poverty in 2020 under the baseline scenario and 100 million people under the downside

¹ Launch of Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19, New York, 25 March 2020
<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2020-03-25/launch-of-global-humanitarian-response-plan-for-covid-19>.

² US COVID-19 strategy failing the poor, says UN expert, Geneva, 16 April 2020.
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25798&LangID=E>.

³ Ibidm.

⁴ Projected poverty impacts of COVID-19 (coronavirus), a World Bank Brief, 8 June 2020.
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/projected-poverty-impacts-of-COVID-19>.

scenario. As a result, the global extreme poverty rate is expected to increase from 8.23% in 2019 to 8.82% under the baseline scenario or 9.18% under the downside scenario. In addition, the number of people living under the international poverty lines for lower and upper middle-income countries, COVID-19 is expected to generate a combined figure of about 350 million additional poor people, which is equivalent to an increase in the poverty rate of 2.3 percentage points compared to a no-COVID-19 scenario. The study further indicates that almost half of the projected new poor will be living in South Asia, and more than a third in Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵

We are especially concerned about the challenges posed by COVID-19 to the enjoyment of human rights in the developing countries in Africa and elsewhere in the world. Available data suggests that the rate of COVID-19 proliferation in Africa is in the increase and that thousands of individuals on the continent are expected to fall victims to this pandemic in the coming months, which poses particular challenges and risks.

We call on all states, especially African states, to adopt a holistic human rights approach to address COVID-19 and to prioritise prevention measures as the most effective policy to contain the spread of this pandemic. The prevention campaign should rest on proper efforts to disseminate correct and easy to digest information about the disease as well as testing, tracing and isolating suspected cases. Protection and training of health workers on the front lines of the response should be a major component of Africa's strategy to combat the pandemic. We further call on African states to facilitate the return of their citizens, especially those who are stranded along international borders and to accord equal attention to all people living within their territories, especially the most vulnerable groups such as the elderly, prisoners, internally displaced persons, migrants and refugees.

To enable Africa to make successful efforts to mitigate the multiple effects of COVID-19 and to save its economies from collapse, we call on the international community to write off all of Africa's foreign debts to the regional and international financial institutions.

Finally, we urge all civil society partners and associates across the continent of Africa, the United States of America and elsewhere in the world to play an active role in the national campaigns to combat the outbreak of this deadly disease in their respective countries and regions. International solidarity is therefore a fundamental basis of collective resistance to fight against COVID-19.

Pan-African Forum on Rights and Development, NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

⁵ Ibidm.