



AUSTRALIA



AUSTRALIAN MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

E-mail australia@un.int

150 East 42nd Street, New York NY 10017-5612 Ph 212 - 351 6600 Fax 212 - 351 6610 www.australia-unscc.gov.au

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

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Open Debate on Pandemics and the Challenges of Sustaining Peace

Written statement submitted by the Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations in New York

The global pandemic has impacted the whole world profoundly and poses particular risks for fragile and conflict-affected countries. We are seeing hard won peacebuilding and development gains jeopardised, economic challenges exacerbated, and societal tensions increased. Responding to the health, economic and social ramifications of the pandemic is now a central challenge, not just for individual states, but for the multilateral system. The UN, international financial institutions, regional organisations, NGOs and member states, need to work together and ensure that a conflict prevention perspective is incorporated into all COVID-19 responses.

Australia supports the UN Secretary-General's call for a Global Ceasefire, and continues to provide long term core funding to the UN peacebuilding agencies. We welcome the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2532 and commend the important contribution of UN peace operations and country teams to local and national COVID-19 efforts around the world.

In this crisis, we must continue to recognise the importance of social cohesion, resilience and inclusive approaches. We commend the UN peacebuilding agencies for consistently promoting gendered and youth perspectives, as well as the long term peacebuilding efforts of the UN in the Pacific, particularly in PNG and the Solomon Islands. We urge the UN and member states to intensify efforts to support the meaningful inclusion of women and youth as agents of change in shaping our global pandemic response. This is essential given the evidence that the negative impacts of COVID-19 are disproportionately affecting already vulnerable groups in society, including women and youth.

We must not let the pandemic, nor our responses to it, undermine gender equality, development, peacebuilding or human rights gains. We must use its disruption and urgency as an opportunity to ‘build back better’ including through taking forward UN reforms. This debate is particularly timely in the context of the Peacebuilding Architecture Review. We welcome the UN Secretary-General’s report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace, which highlighted good progress in a number of areas, particularly in relation to the Resident Coordinators’ Offices, which have a critical role in managing the UN’s COVID-19 response. We urge all stakeholders to continue to drive implementation of the sustaining peace agenda. This work is vital, not only to combatting the pandemic, but to creating resilience for other global challenges to come.