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THE UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**OPENING REMARKS TO THE 2021 HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF
THE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FORUM**

New York/Virtual, 6 May 2021

Your Excellency, Mr. Munir Akram, President of the Economic and Social Council,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to join the President of ECOSOC in welcoming you to the 2021 Development Cooperation Forum.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense disruption and devastation:

- The deaths of more than three million people,
- A predicted rise in global extreme poverty for the first time in 20 years,
- More than 1.6 billion learners forced out of school, and
- Health and social protection systems pushed to the breaking point.

All this, while the world faces the compounding risks of the climate emergency and deepening inequalities, with uneven and unfair effect especially on women and girls.

The impact of these unfolding challenges has put international development cooperation to an unprecedented test.

Without a stronger response, the world risks the devastations of a “lost decade” of development in developing countries.

The story of development cooperation during the crisis is still being written. But experiences and lessons have come to light. And an evidence base and public demand for a stronger response and recovery are forming.

The Development Cooperation Forum is here to fuel development thinking and propel progress in a period of uncertainty.

To support your action-oriented discussions over these next two days, I would like to share with you five insights from the DCF work. These draw on the Report of the Secretary-General on Trends and progress in International Development Cooperation and data update, the latest DCF Survey exercise and online preparatory events. I would like to thank, in particular, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Government of the Republic of Indonesia for their generous support to this work.

First, effective development cooperation in the COVID-19 period and beyond means helping developing countries to reduce risk and build resilience.

The wide-ranging impact of COVID-19 has exposed the increasingly complex risk landscape. Development cooperation policies and practices of developing countries and their international partners have to account and plan for short-term and systemic risks. Otherwise, the consequences of future shocks will be even greater.

Your discussions should collect recommendations for making development cooperation more risk-informed, building on experiences and practices emerging from the pandemic.

Second, development finance in its various forms needs to be urgently scaled up, with official development assistance (ODA) serving a distinctive function in support of developing countries' resilience.

The pandemic and its consequences brought an unexpected decline in domestic resources, trade, foreign direct investment and remittances. ODA is an essential resource for responding to interlocking crises in developing countries. Grant financing is particularly vital for the poorest and most vulnerable countries, at high risk of debt distress. The decline of grant financing relative to loans should be reversed.

Your discussions need to focus on how ODA commitments can be met, drawing on the example and lessons of those that have successfully protected or increased development cooperation budgets during the crisis.

Third, development cooperation in all its forms has been critical in mounting the short-term health response; and it will be essential in building long-term resilience of developing countries' health capacities and systems.

South-South and triangular cooperation have facilitated the transfer of essential medical supplies and staff during the crisis. Diverse global health actors, from public and private sectors, have partnered through the ACT-Accelerator to drive global, equitable development of and access to healthcare tools for fighting the pandemic.

How can development cooperation to end the health crisis bolster the transformative effort to build capacities and infrastructure, resolve bottlenecks, and strengthen health systems? I hope that the DCF will generate concrete ideas for development cooperation to help build back better health systems in developing countries.

Fourth, the pandemic recovery should reduce the obstacles to accessing and attracting development cooperation for climate action and disaster risk reduction.

Recent analysis by the Global Recovery Observatory estimated that only 18 per cent of pandemic recovery spending so far has been “green” or environmentally positive. Given the growing risks and enormity of the sums involved, recovery spending should be geared to support disaster risk reduction, resilient infrastructure and decent work.

The DCF should collect and crystallize ideas for ramping up high-quality, high-impact development cooperation that supports most vulnerable countries and peoples to get back on track towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement.

Finally, the pandemic is driving innovation at the regional and local levels that can help make resilience building part of the new DNA of development cooperation.

Innovative partnerships among regional partners have helped to tackle real-time data and statistical challenges and scale up the use of digital technologies in response to urgent health and educational needs. And regional development banks and mechanisms have helped to mobilize billions of dollars to assist countries responding to the socioeconomic and health crisis.

The pandemic has also shown that many local communities, including civil society, cooperated in the crisis context. They helped to fill the void in service delivery for food and medicine distribution; developed health tools and personal protective equipment; and designed information and awareness campaigns on COVID-19.

Risk and vulnerability have local and regional dimensions. The DCF should explore opportunities for boosting the capacities and contributions of local and regional efforts toward more effective development cooperation and long-term resilience.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Secretary-General calls the pandemic recovery a “once in a generation opportunity” to make an enormous push in shifting the efforts of all stakeholders towards the SDGs and climate action.

A reimagined understanding of development cooperation that is informed by risk, designed to build resilience and strongly linked with climate action can serve as a ballast for collective action.

We have the global agreements already in place to build back better – the 2030 and Addis Agendas, Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework. What we need is more concerted and creative implementation, where efforts at all levels reinforce country systems and build national and local capacities.

The DCF is your Forum for driving the changes needed. It is inclusive and fueled by the deep knowledge, expertise and commitment of all of its participants.

In the context of one of the worst global setbacks of our lifetimes, your actions inspire and give strategic direction to the contribution of development cooperation in this Decade of Action for the SDGs.

I urge you to be bold and be specific. And I wish you a most productive meeting.

Thank you.
