

2021 Development Cooperation Forum

“Strengthening health systems for vulnerable countries”

Intervention by
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*H.E. Ambassador Munir Akram, President of the ECOSOC
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen*

Good afternoon to you all.

It is a great pleasure for me to join this interactive dialogue on “strengthening health systems for vulnerable countries” of the 2021 High-level meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum.

2. I would also like to thank the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council for organising this important event to advance international development cooperation to assist vulnerable countries in building resilience in the covid-19 period and beyond.

Excellencies,

3. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented socio-economic consequences worldwide. We have been fighting against this invincible enemy for over a year now. The immediate impact of the pandemic on the public health systems, in particular in the developing economies and vulnerable community is enormous. It has disproportionately impacted the already marginalized groups in our societies.

4. Simultaneously, the disruption in health systems has threatened the hard-won uninterrupted progress made towards the attainment of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

Distinguished Participants,

5. You would agree that though the covid-19 pandemic has affected all countries irrespective of their development status, impacts on vulnerable countries are severe where the health systems are mostly fragile. In these countries, high population densities, especially in urban and slum areas, vulnerable economic conditions compared to higher-income countries are the main challenges. As a result, it is crucial to provide necessary support to the developing countries, particularly to the least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), and small island developing States (SIDS).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. In Bangladesh, we have adopted “Whole-of-Government” and “Whole of Society” approaches to respond to the pandemic under the able leadership of our Hon’ble Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina. The government of Bangladesh has been very quick to roll out a stimulus package worth more than 1.24 trillion-taka equivalent to USD 14.58 billion, which is around 4.44% of our GDP. We have developed a ‘National Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19’ in line with WHO’s Global Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. Importantly, the 1.1 million Rohingyas that we are hosting are also included in our overall strategy.

7. The response plan outlines a multi-sector coordination structure, which includes ten technical pillars that focus on the epidemiological response and health service delivery, including surveillance and laboratory support, infection prevention and control as well as three cross-cutting pillars—planning coordination and response strategy, logistics and procurement, risk communication and community engagement, and research. Furthermore, we have set up a National Committee and a Technical Committee to monitor the situation.

8. Bangladesh also joined other countries to support the ‘Access to Covid-19 Tools’ (ACT) initiative to fast-track global access to safe, quality, effective, and affordable Covid-19 related products. Bangladesh also has extended support to another critical initiative like COVAX Facility, which addresses innovative financing and procurement mechanisms to ensure that low-income countries can obtain Covid -19 vaccines. Our aim is to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’ in the fight against Covid -19 through these initiatives.

Excellencies,

9. The covid-19 pandemic has taught us that “no one is safe until everyone is safe”. To respond to the pandemic effectively, we need cooperation, solidarity and collective efforts among us with particular focus to the vulnerable communities. We need to work together to improve the health systems of the countries that need assistance. If we want to prevent a recurrence of the pandemic, we need to prepare, prevent, and recover together.

10. Development partners plays a significant role in this sector. However, for preparedness and response to health crises like the current pandemic, the flow of resources in the form of development cooperation is insufficient. Moreover, in many cases, the focus of the support is ‘targeted’ rather than ‘systemic’ towards a universal health care system. As such, the development cooperation should give priority to build resilient and robust health systems in the vulnerable countries that would enable these countries to respond effectively in future shocks. Furthermore, these support measures would be more effective if those could focus on capacity building of the respective countries in management of national and global health threats. Sharing of knowledge for practical solutions to the crises and promoting best practices is equally important.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

11. It is our shared responsibility to support each other, especially for those who are in the most challenging circumstances. We need increased partnership to share science, technology, data, vaccines and other tools to fight effectively against the global emergencies like the covid-19 pandemic and beyond. Strong political commitment and global solidarity can secure affordable and equitable access to essential diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines for all.

12. To build robust health architecture, we need to invest more on health sector which should be at the core of the development plan. Developing countries will require short-medium and long-term support from the bilateral and multilateral development partners in the form of finance, capacity building, technology transfer, debt waiver, concessional loans, and grants.

I thank you all.
