

Joint press statement by

H.E. Ms. Lindiwe Zulu, Minister of Social Development of South Africa
H.E. Mr. Peter Eriksson, Minister for International Development Cooperation of Sweden
H.E. Mr. Gent Cakaj, Acting Minister for Europe & Foreign Affairs of Albania
H.E. Mr. Felipe Carlos Solá, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade & Worship of Argentina
H.E. Hon. Marise Payne, Minister of Foreign Affairs & Minister of Women of Australia
H.E. Mr. Alexander De Croo, Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Development Cooperation of Belgium
H.E. Mrs Karen Longaric Rodríguez, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bolivia
H.E. Ms. Bisera Turkovic, Deputy Chairperson of the Council of Ministers & Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina
H.E. Ms. Maritza Rosabal Peña Minister of Education, Family & Social Inclusion of Cabo Verde
H.E. Ms. Karina Gould, Minister for International Development of Canada
H.E. Mr. Nikos Christodoulides, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus
H.E. Mr. Tomáš Petříček, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic
H.E. Mr. Rasmus Prehn, Minister for Development Cooperation of Denmark
H.E. Hon. Mereseini Vuniwaqa, Minister for Women, Children & Poverty Alleviation of Fiji
H.E. Mr. Ville Skinnari, Minister for Development Cooperation & Foreign Trade of Finland
H.E. Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe & Foreign Affairs of France
H.E. Dr. Maria Flachsbarth, Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany
H.E. Mr. Nikos Dendias, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece
H.E. Ms. Diene Keita, Minister for International Cooperation & Regional Integration of Guinea
H.E. Ms. Emanuela Del Re Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation of Italy
H.E. Ms. Ilze Vinkele, Minister of Health of Latvia
H. E. Ms. Claudine Aoun, President of the National Commission for Lebanese Women of Lebanon
H.E. Mr. Gbehzohngar Milton Findley Minister of Foreign Affairs of Liberia,
H.E. Mr. Franz Fayot, Minister for Cooperation and Humanitarian Action of Luxembourg
H.E. Mr. Tehindrazanarivelo Djacoba A. S. Oliva, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Madagascar
H.E. Mr. Srđan Darmanović, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro
H.E. Ms. Doreen Sioka, Minister of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare of Namibia
H.E. Ms Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade & Development Co-operation of the Netherlands
H.E. Rt. Hon Winston Peters, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Zealand
H.E. Mr. Nikola Dimitrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia
H.E. Mr. Dag-Inge Ulstein, Minister of International Development of Norway
H.E. Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, Secretary of State of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Portugal
H.E. Mr. Cornel Feruță, State Secretary for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania
H.E. Ms. Slavica Djukic-Dejanovic, Minister without Portfolio responsible for Demography and Population Policy of Serbia
H.E. Ms. Arancha González Laya, Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union & Cooperation of Spain
H.E. Dr. Ignazio Cassis, Foreign Minister of Switzerland
H.E. Ms. Liz Sugg, Minister for International Development & the Foreign & Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom

and the governments of Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Croatia, Ecuador, Estonia, Georgia, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Mexico, Moldova, Peru, Republic of Korea, Slovenia, Tunisia, Ukraine and Uruguay.

Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender-responsiveness in the COVID-19 crisis

We, the Ministers of South Africa, Sweden, Argentina, Australia, Albania, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Fiji, France, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Italy, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Namibia, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, are honored to issue this joint statement on behalf of the people and governments of 58 countries: Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Cabo Verde, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mexico, Moldova, Montenegro, Namibia, Netherlands, North Macedonia, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Serbia, South Africa, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Tunisia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Ukraine and Uruguay.

Humanity is confronted with the unprecedented threat of COVID-19. Around the world, the pandemic is having a devastating impact on health systems, economies and the lives, livelihood and wellbeing of all, particularly older people. Responding effectively to this fast-growing pandemic requires solidarity and cooperation among all governments, scientists, civil society actors and the private sector.

COVID-19 affects women and men differently. The pandemic makes existing inequalities for women and girls, as well as discrimination of other marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty worse and risk impeding the realization of human rights for women and girls. Participation, protection and potential of all women and girls must be at the center of response efforts. These efforts must be gender-responsive and consider different impacts surrounding detection, diagnosis and access to treatment for all women and men.

The restrictive measures designed to limit the spread of the virus around the world, increase the risk of domestic violence, including intimate partner violence. As health and social protection as well as legal systems that protect all women and girls under normal circumstances are weakened or under pressure by the COVID-19, specific measures should be implemented to prevent violence against women and girls. The emergency responses should ensure that all women and girls who are refugees, migrants or internally displaced are protected. Sexual and reproductive health needs, including psychosocial support services, and protection from gender-based violence, must be prioritized to ensure continuity. We must also assume responsibility for social protection and ensure adolescent health, rights and wellbeing during schools close-down. Any restrictions to the enjoyment of human rights should be prescribed by law, and in accordance with international law and rigorously assessed.

We support the active participation and leadership of women and girls at all levels of decision-making, including at community level, through their networks and organizations, to ensure efforts and response are gender-responsive and will not further discriminate and exclude those most at risk.

It is crucial that leaders recognize the central role of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in health emergencies and the need for robust health systems to save lives. In this context, sexual health services are essential. We recommit to the immediate implementation of the UHC political declaration by all. Funding sexual and reproductive health and rights should remain a priority to avoid a rise in maternal and newborn mortality, increased unmet need for contraception, and an increased number of unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections.

Around the world, midwives, nurses and community health workers are essential to contain COVID-19 and they require personal protective equipment. Safe pregnancy and childbirth depend on all these health workers, adequate health facilities, and strict adherence to infection prevention. Respiratory illnesses in pregnant women, particularly COVID-19 infections, must be priority due to increased risk of adverse outcomes. As our national and international supply chains are impacted by this pandemic, we recommit to providing all women and girls of reproductive age with reproductive health commodities. And we call on governments around the world to ensure full and unimpeded access to all sexual and reproductive health services for all women and girls.

We welcome the multilateral efforts, including by the UN, including UNFPA and UN Women, WHO, the World Bank and IMF, and regional development banks, as well as the G7 and G20 declarations, towards a coherent and global response to COVID-19. We encourage them all in their efforts with national governments and other partners to ensure an effective response and assurance of the continuation of essential health services and rights.

We must coordinate our efforts in this global health crisis. We support the UN General Assembly resolution entitled *Global Solidarity to fight COVID-19*. And we encourage all governments, the private sector, civil society, philanthropists and others to join us in supporting the emergency response, particularly in the most vulnerable countries, and to give full effect to the global commitment to universal access to health care.

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