

Opening Plenary

The Global Economy After COVID-19: Turning Challenges Into Opportunities

10:00-11:30 (Bangkok time, GMT+7), 9 June 2020

United Nations Virtual Forum on Responsible Business and Human Rights

New Challenges. New Approaches.

Asia and the Pacific | 9-12 June 2020 | www.rbhforum.com

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a public health crisis but also a social and economic one. This unprecedented shock to economies and markets is threatening livelihoods and the wellbeing of millions of people in both developed and developing countries. Developing countries are forecast to be affected disproportionately, with marginalized sections of society especially at risk of being drawn into poverty. Since COVID-19 once again reveals structural patterns of inequality and social injustice, it is crucial to reflect on how we can adopt human rights-based approaches to address these structural issues, recover from the COVID-19 crisis, and build back better our global and national economies.

In April, the ILO estimated the equivalent of 305 million full time jobs is likely to have been lost globally in the second quarter, tens of millions of them in Asia and the Pacific. Informal and migrant workers, many of whom are women, have been among the hardest hit, losing, on average, 60 per cent of their income. Many of these vulnerable workers will be forced deeper into poverty. Further, COVID-19 is impacting women disproportionately. Evidence shows that several long-standing issues that impede women's full and equal economic participation in the region are being exacerbated by the crisis, including the unequal share of unpaid domestic and care work, gender-based violence, disproportionate concentration of women in low-wage, low-skilled jobs and the informal economy, and an increasing digital gender divide. Moreover, across the region, the wellbeing of children, persons of old age and LGBTI+ persons is being jeopardized. As resources are being allocated to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, environmental and climate justice risk being neglected.

COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of global value chains on which so many emerging Asian economies have based their recent growth efforts. Regional and global collaboration is urgently needed to address the economic impacts caused by COVID-19, to avoid social instability and political polarization. Arguably, the world has the means to deal with COVID-19 and its socioeconomic consequences but comprehensive global collaboration is currently lacking.

While lowered emissions and pollution levels have provided a thin silver lining, showing that it is possible to lower emission levels, these benefits are temporary and the crisis risks diverting attention from the climate and environmental challenges of the region. With a looming climate and biodiversity emergency, the region cannot afford for this to happen.

History has shown that a crisis can profoundly shift thinking about how economies are governed, leading to various questions: Will this pandemic open the door to reforms in the global economy? Will it motivate

a rethinking of the institutional and policy frameworks and practices that have left countries so exposed to the negative consequences of the crisis? Can rebuilding Asia-Pacific economies in the aftermath of COVID-19 provide an opportunity to reconstruct an ecosystem that is fairer, more sustainable and more resilient, one that also takes into account planetary health? What are the challenges that policymakers in the region face in the aftermath of the current pandemic, including how to ensure that trade and investment regimes leave no one behind? How can more global and regional collaboration be achieved in a time where States are putting their own interests first? With a looming climate and biodiversity emergency, how can States ensure to integrate environmental and social concerns in stimulus packages and policies, to ensure to build back better? And how can the adverse effects of the virus be addressed without sacrificing responsible business practices?

Session description

This session will explore the economic, social and political impacts of the pandemic and their consequences for responsible business practices and policymaking in Asia and the Pacific, including the impacts on women, children, migrant workers, indigenous peoples, and LGBTI+ persons, and the need to address environmental and climate hazards. The session will reflect on potential pathways for recovering from the COVID-19 crisis, and discuss opportunities and challenges to accelerate social and environmental justice and rebuild resilient economies in which humans and the environment remain at the centre, and explore how global collaboration can be achieved. With reflections from United Nations leaders and rights holders, and insightful analyses from experts, the session will provide insights from governments, international organizations, national human rights institutions, businesses, civil society organizations and rights holders on how to navigate the response and turn threats into opportunities. The opening plenary has three parts:

Part 1:

Welcome:

- **Dr. Harpreet Kaur**, Business and Human Rights Specialist, UNDP

Opening video message (UN leadership)

- **Prof. Surya Deva**, Member, UN working Group on Business and Human Rights
- **Ms. Armida Alisjahbana**, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
- **Ms. Kanni Wignaraja**, Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, United Nations Development Programme
- **Ms. Tomoko Nishimoto**, Assistant Director-General and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, International Labour Organization
- **Mr. Mohammad Naciri**, Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
- **Ms. Karin Hulshof**, Regional Director, East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, United Nations Children's Fund

Part 2:

Facilitated discussion (UN leadership)

- **Prof. Surya Deva (moderator)**, Member UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights
- **Dr. Harpreet Kaur (moderator)**, Business and Human Rights Specialist, United Nations Development Programme
- **H.E. Mr. Pär Ahlberger (video)**, Ambassador for Sustainable Business, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Government of Sweden
- **Ms. Valerie Cliff**, Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, Director Bangkok Regional Hub, United Nations Development Programme
- **Mr. Kaveh Zahedi**, Deputy Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
- **Ms. Panudda Boonpala**, Deputy Regional Director, Office for Asia and the Pacific, International Labour Organization
- **Ms. Sarah Knibbs**, Deputy Regional Director, UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
- **Mr. Marcoluigi Corsi**, Deputy Regional Director, East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, United Nations Children's Fund
- **Mr. Gam Shimray**, Secretary-General, Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact
- **Ms. Shamini Darshini Kaliemuthu**, Executive Director, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
- **Ms. Sharan Burrow**, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation
- **Mr. Rajeev Dubey**, Group President (HR & Corporate Services) and CEO (After-Market sector), Mahinda & Mahindra Ltd