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## **PRESS STATEMENT**

**23 April 2020**

**UNIC/PR/2020/04/23**

### **United Nations commends South Africa's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Pretoria:** The United Nations applauds South Africa's response to the COVID-19 pandemic which has focussed on saving and protecting lives, livelihoods and businesses with particular emphasis on those persons who are most vulnerable.

"South Africa has demonstrated bold and decisive leadership through its strategies to intensify the public health response to COVID-19, develop a comprehensive package of economic support measures to assist businesses and individuals affected by the pandemic, and develop a programme of increased social support to protect poor and vulnerable households. I commend the Government, business community, civil society and all stakeholders for their collective efforts to preserve the health and well-being of the people of this country, and to protect the economy" said Nardos Bekele-Thomas, the head of the UN in South Africa and Resident Coordinator. "These measures, in particular, immediate assistance to the most vulnerable people in our communities, including women and children, demonstrate that Government and partners, understand the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on the people of this country, and are prepared to take the necessary steps to reduce the scale and scope of suffering caused by the pandemic."

The stimulus package announced by the Government, seeks to protect the wages of workers in the formal economy, ease the burden of COVID-19 on small, medium and micro-sized businesses, including spaza shops and informal businesses, and protect the lives and livelihoods of informal workers and the most vulnerable. The actions outlined in the stimulus package will be key to mitigating the economic impacts of the pandemic, which could otherwise send numerous persons who are already living on the edge of hardship, into poverty and increasing hunger. These economic measures should also take into account, the important role that small-scale farmers play in rural economies, given their contributions to national and household food and nutrition security.

Evidence from across the globe has highlighted the pandemic's devastating consequences on women and girls in every sphere, from health and the economy, to security and social protection. The Government's announcement of strengthened protection and support measures, including shelters for women and girls at increased risk of gender-based violence under the lock-down, are therefore welcomed; as well as measures designed to ensure that women, youth and persons with disabilities are prioritized in the socio-economic response plan.

The decision to increase the child grant and other social grants will also make an important contribution to reducing vulnerability for most at-risk households, including women-headed households. This is further complemented by the support to the informal sector, which provides livelihoods to millions of households, many of which are headed by women, and who play key roles varying from childcare at Early Childhood



Development centres, domestic workers, women traders as well as those under-employed in casual and insecure employment.

Recognizing that the impact of COVID-19 goes beyond the health sector, the Government's proposed actions to keep communities clean and free from waste, will play an important role in ensuring a green, sustainable and resilient recovery. COVID-19 is generating additional medical waste which if not effectively managed, poses a threat to human health and the environment. A clean environment is essential to human health and wellbeing.

In order to build on the positive actions that have already been taken at national level, the United Nations system calls on South Africa to continue to pursue robust social and economic interventions, with a people-centred approach, built on respect for human rights and inclusion, gender equality and dignity for all. The success of the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts requires a whole of society approach with strong coordination at national and provincial levels, including public-private sector partnerships that involve stakeholders from across multiple sectors, Chapter 9 institutions, trade unions, the business community, civil society organizations and the international community. Partnerships based on solidarity will be the cornerstone of progress.

The UN further calls on South Africa to ensure that the response and recovery efforts engage and mobilize the affected, and at-risk communities including children, elderly people, the unemployed, the homeless, persons with disabilities, LGBT people, persons in the informal sector and rural areas, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and people living with HIV or other underlying conditions such as tuberculosis. South Africa's response to HIV/AIDS showed that if people are effectively engaged, communities will have a vital role in identifying issues and finding innovative solutions.

The United Nations has been collaborating with the Government, the business community, civil society organizations and international development actors to identify gaps and sustainable solutions for responding to COVID-19 in the immediate-, medium- and long-term future, recognizing that in order to effectively mitigate against, and manage the impact of COVID-19, there must be strategic coordination across all stakeholders and sectors.

The UN recognizes that renewed approaches in addressing socio-economic challenges that are centred on addressing inequality and in particular populations that have been left behind will go a long way towards reducing poverty. COVID-19 has revealed that an economy cannot grow without addressing these underlying disparities, and we must use this opportunity to ensure that the people we serve, emerge stronger and more resilient from this crisis.

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