

# Acting Administrator John Barsa Letter to UN Secretary General Guterres

## **For Immediate Release**

Monday, May 18, 2020

Office of Press Relations

The Honorable  
António Guterres  
The United Nations Secretary-General  
United Nations Headquarters  
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

Thank you for your continued efforts to advance the purposes and principles of the United Nations (UN), including the sovereign equality of all its Member States, which the UN Charter established decades ago.

As the largest donor of global health and humanitarian assistance, the United States always has led the world through times of strife, turmoil, and uncertainty. The current pandemic of COVID-19 is no different. Thus far, of the \$650.7 million allocated from supplemental funding by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to combat the pandemic globally, we have provided \$45.3 million to UN agencies. This is a fraction of USAID's overall financial support for the UN's activities, which in Fiscal Year 2019 totaled more than \$3.5 billion in funds disbursed.

As the UN and Member States around the world work to address the pandemic of COVID-19, I urge you, your staff, and the UN's funds, programs, and specialized and technical agencies to stay focused on life-saving interventions. The delivery of essential health care is the first priority around the globe during this time. In addition, severe food shortages could represent a second, deadly impact of the pandemic in many countries. The UN's Global Humanitarian Response Plan (Global HRP), and its \$6.71 billion coordinated appeal, must remain focused on addressing the most urgent, concrete needs that are arising out of the pandemic.

Therefore, the UN should not use this crisis as an opportunity to advance access to abortion as an "essential service." Unfortunately, the Global HRP does just this, by cynically placing the provision of "sexual and reproductive health services" on the same level of importance as food-insecurity, essential health care, malnutrition, shelter, and sanitation. Most egregious is that the Global HRP calls for the widespread distribution of abortion-inducing drugs and abortion supplies, and for the promotion of abortion in local country settings.

Under the leadership of President Donald J. Trump, the United States has made clear that we will "never tire of defending innocent life." President Trump said in his address to the 74th UN General Assembly that the UN simply has "no business attacking the sovereignty of nations that wish to protect innocent life." Indeed, the UN should not intimidate or coerce Member States that are committed to the right to life. To use the COVID-19 pandemic as a justification to pressure governments to change their

laws is an affront to the autonomy of each society to determine its own national policies on health care. The United States stands with nations that have pledged to protect the unborn.

To achieve global unity toward this goal, it is essential that the UN's response to the pandemic avoid creating controversy. Therefore, I ask that you remove references to "sexual and reproductive health," and its derivatives from the Global HRP, and drop the provision of abortion as an essential component of the UN's priorities to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Member States are deeply divided over the use of the term "sexual and reproductive health" and its derivatives, and it is among the most polarizing issues raised in UN negotiations. The Global HRP, and the activities of UN agencies and bodies moving forward, should use clear language and take clear action to address the real needs of vulnerable people around the world without promoting abortion. Now is not the time to add unnecessary discord to the COVID-19 response.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. The United States remains committed to working with you to preserve human life and defeat the pandemic of COVID-19. I wish you good health and safety during these challenging days.

Sincerely yours,  
John Barsa

Cc: The Honorable Kelly Craft, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations