



## **Joint Statement on COVID-19 and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration**

**July 2020**

The IAWG-DDR acknowledges the universal challenge posed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and the containment measures that governments have adopted, affecting the United Nations, all Member-States and their populations around the world, with profound implications for the most vulnerable among us. The global response continues to require unified efforts, supporting the UN Secretary-General's Appeal for global ceasefire, harnessing peace and peacebuilding efforts, and supporting community resilience to prepare for, respond to and recover from the effects of the pandemic in the months and years to come.

All countries are impacted, including conflict-affected and post-conflict countries. Armed groups may exploit the effects of the pandemic and the containment measures or may seize opportunities to protect populations living in territories they control and further consolidate peace. Armed groups linked to criminal networks and weapons and drug trafficking, as well as the illicit exploitation of natural resources, are reacting and adapting to restrictions of movement with implications for DDR planning processes.

The IAWG-DDR will spare no efforts to support the achievement of peace, including by keeping stakeholders abreast and partnering with them to achieve the goals of DDR, supporting the negotiation of DDR clauses in peace agreements or assisting with the reintegration where spontaneous demobilization takes place, also during the COVID-19 pandemic. Noting that peace negotiations and DDR planning are increasingly held online, we will strive to bridge the digital divide that disproportionately affects local women's and young people's networks, local civil society organizations and people living in remote locations through increased access to IT equipment and connectivity as well as adapted working modalities.

DDR processes and programmes are similarly affected by the pandemic and the containment measures adopted by public authorities across the world. The IAWG-DDR expresses solidarity with Governments at all levels, including national DDR commissions, reintegration agencies and DDR focal points and applauds those who have continued to serve DDR processes and programmes, and thereby peace, under the current circumstances. The pandemic poses specific challenges to planned disarmament operations, to disarmed combatants in cantonment areas awaiting demobilization and threatens the health and livelihoods of ex-combatants and persons formerly associated with armed forces and groups. Reintegration back into civilian life, sustainably supported by their families and communities, is further hindered.

As always, it is essential that the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces and groups continue as swiftly as possible and without preconditions, and that all those willing to abandon violence and exit from armed groups and reintegrate into civilian life are supported to do so, by keeping reception centers open and ensuring continued provision of services. The IAWG-DDR also expresses grave concern about the recruitment and re-recruitment of children and young people, as well as victimization of women and girls in armed groups, which may increase if the secondary effects of the pandemic in the form of socio-economic crisis and conflicts are exacerbated.

UN missions, humanitarian and development agencies, programmes and funds at the country level have refocused much of their operations and programmes towards the COVID-19 response. National DDR processes can also contribute to the COVID-19 response by undertaking preventive measures to avoid further spread of COVID-19, mitigating risks and adapting existing programmes or reprogramming and repurposing DDR funds and activities where needed to protect its implementing partners and programme participants and beneficiaries. Moving from response to recovery, DDR can support access of programme participants to gender-responsive social protection measures and other socio-economic support to businesses and job creation. In this context, it is important to recall and take steps to protect the women and children who may be at particular risk of domestic violence during government containment measures or persons with disability and older people who may be left in isolation.

It should be also recalled that the Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) have recognized the importance of health in DDR processes, to prevent the transmission of communicable diseases as ex-combatants return to communities. Much can be learned from curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS through DDR programmes over the years, as well as lessons learned from the UN system's Ebola response, that can be useful for the COVID-19 response in DDR. Concretely, DDR contributes to the COVID-19 response by supporting partners' acquisition or local production of personal protective equipment (PPE), the adoption of infection prevention and control measures (IPC), including in closed settings such as cantonments to protect combatants and nearby communities. We further highlight that no DDR personnel or programmatic activities should become a vector of transmission and spread of COVID-19.

The IAWG-DDR thanks its partners, including donors, for our continued partnership and reaffirms its commitment to advancing peace and to support those who lay down their arms during the pandemic and as we all adapt to a 'new normal'. We will work to equip local, national and regional stakeholders with updated and adapted policies and tools to deliver DDR processes and programmes where they are needed. Moreover, we will seize the opportunity generated by the pandemic to deepen the online DDR training offered in collaboration with the Integrated DDR Training Group (IDDRTG), and explore gender-responsive ways for DDR practitioners to access online technical support, knowledge and training platforms from wherever they may be located.

---

The IAWG-DDR members are CTED, DGC, DPO, DPPA, DPPA/PBSO, ILO, IOM, ODA, OHCHR, OSAA, OSRSG CAAC, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNEP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIDIR, UNITAR, UNOCT, UNODC, UNOPS, UN Women, WFP, WHO and the World Bank. DPO and UNDP are co-chairs of the IAWG-DDR. OLA also participates in IAWG-DDR meetings and activities. The African Union has observer status with the IAWG-DDR.