

2. ACT Alliance-Action by Churches Together, Anglican Consultative Council, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, Presbyterian Church (USA), United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

As networks of churches and Christian faith-based organizations with a global membership present in over 165 countries, working for decades in humanitarian response, human rights-based development and interfaith cooperation, we support the vision and aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030. Our faith inspires us to work to address the needs of all people, particularly those that are most marginalized, honoring the fullness of humanity, and our work ensures that no one is left behind.

Our networks extend into some of the most remote areas-areas that are often out of the institutional reach of national and local governments, making us critical partners for governments and multilateral institutions. Our work is to ensure that no one is left behind

We have first-hand experience with the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has on local communities, undermining years of development, exposing pernicious inequalities and disproportionately affecting women and girls and marginalized groups already disadvantaged by deeply rooted discriminatory social, economic and political systems. We welcome the opportunity to offer comments and recommendations for consideration in relation to theme of this year's High Level Political Forum. As faith-based actors playing a critical role in promoting resilient communities and just global systems and structures, we raise the following particular issues.

SDG 5: Gender-responsive policies and ending Gender Based Violence

We welcome the inclusion of the additional section on 'other priority issues' in the final outline for the Ministerial Declaration, that serves to address 'cross-cutting issues'. This is particularly important to ensure that there is full and consistent consideration of the differential experiences and impacts of policies on men and women and boys and girls. We regret that Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality was not included as an essential goal in relation to the focus of the High Level Political Forum, and fear that this omission will have dangerous consequences.

Women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. There is mounting evidence, including in reports released by the United Nations and its agencies, documenting the extent to and manner in which women face increased burden of care, more severe reductions in economic opportunity, significant increase in gender-based violence and increased vulnerability to extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic. The effect on women and girls must be seriously taken into account in each of the goals to be addressed, and women must be part of the design and implementation of policies at all levels.

SDG 8: Sustained and inclusive economic growth and decent work

The COVID-19 pandemic has set off a global economic recession, exacerbating pre-existing socio-economic disparities and intensifying hunger, poverty, unemployment, and indebtedness

for billions of people. Those who are already marginalized by systemic injustice and based on their identities--gender, class, race, ethnicity or others--have been hardest hit.

The world of work has been significantly reshaped, marked by increasing precariousness and insecurity. At the same time, there is an unprecedented opportunity to create dignified employment in the transition to a more ecologically-friendly economy.

Moreover, the intersection of the global health, economic and climate crises have significantly affected states' ability to recover. These need to be understood as interconnected crises, and the multifaceted ways in which they impact sustainable growth. An inclusive, sustainable and life-affirming economy that prioritizes decent work for all is necessary now more than ever. In order to have a successful decade of action, the inequalities reinforced by the pandemic must be addressed systematically and at all levels--local, national, regional, and global.

SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities within and among countries

Essential to reducing inequalities is the need to confront racism and ensure racial justice is and should be our ecumenical contribution toward the renewal of the church. Although churches today understand racism to be a sin and its theological justification a heresy, this has not always been the case. The ecumenical family and the states in which we operate therefore need to continue addressing our history and our reality self-critically.

Responding to the interconnected crises and enabling a just and sustainable recovery entails tremendous resources. Low and middle-income countries cannot continue to prioritize external debt payments over saving people's lives and tackling the climate emergency. Governments that are overburdened by debt accumulated during the response to Covid 19 will face challenges that will long outlast the pandemic, reinforcing global inequalities, especially between and among countries. Governments must collaboratively work to reduce these inequalities without impacting humanitarian aid and assistance. Without access to vaccines the economies of low and middle-income countries will suffer, thus undermining the efforts of the Sustainable Development Goals. New and more durable ways of mobilizing resources must be found.

SDG 13: Urgent Action to combat climate change and its impacts

Nationally Determined Contributions to reduce greenhouse gases and work towards climate adaptation have fallen far short of what is required to avoid climate catastrophe. This demonstrates the urgent need for governments to strengthen their mitigation commitments under the Paris Agreement and ensure implementation. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed that, when there is political will, there are resources to act and act promptly to avoid the worst consequences. This must be done also when it comes to reducing emissions and protecting the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. COP 26 is one of the last opportunities to fulfill the goals and aspirations in the Paris agreement. This is only done by substantial cuts of emissions and finances for those most affected by climate change.

SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies, justice for all and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions

While divisions, conflicts and violence grow in many parts of the world, Christians, churches, and Christian faith-based organizations continue to build ministries of peace and reconciliation. Churches and faith-based organizations speak out against any form of violence, and they also train front line mediators and hold community dialogues in societies fragmented by conflict.

Faith leaders often hold trusted positions in their communities and have considerable influence to shift attitudes and behaviours, sometimes where governments fail to reach. In this way, faith actors are critical partners in building sustainable peace. For example, in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, many faith leaders and faith communities have been reliable and powerful forces: sharing accurate health information, modelling healthy behaviour, advocating for measures to support the most vulnerable in society. Churches within our networks also are actively working to support peace processes and the quelling of violence in their own communities--from the Korean Peninsula to Colombia, Mozambique and Cameroon to the United States of America.

SDG 17: Critical need for a revitalized multilateralism

As faith-based institutions that have been working with the United Nations since its founding in 1948, we stand up for the integrity of the United Nations system and the importance of multilateralism and international cooperation as a vital means to resolve global injustices. Drawn both from our long-standing work in rights-based development, humanitarian response, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and economic justice as well as recent responses to the COVID19 pandemic, we call for strengthened international solidarity.

We need renewed multilateral collaboration as it is an important means for ensuring a sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This is particularly true in the case of equitable distribution of vaccines against COVID-19 through the COVAX program for low and middle-income countries. These challenges know no borders, and therefore require global solutions. Furthermore, we acknowledge and stress the need to build an inclusive path to recovery and the decade of action for sustainable development, with multi-stakeholder participation, including civil society and gender parity, at local, national and global levels and at all stages of planning, implementation and monitoring.

We call on the international community to join us and implement the following recommendations:

- 1) Provide sufficient resources towards public health, particularly access to vaccines which is crucial to the recovery from the COVID pandemic, and social protection for all people, especially in the immediate future those who have lost their livelihoods during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2) Cancel the external debts of low and middle-income countries.
- 3) Radically increase investments in community-based health care systems, and processes of building community resilience.
- 4) Guarantee that climate action, mitigation, and adaptation and the protection of ecosystems are sufficiently financed and that national commitments are commensurate with the level of global crisis.
- 5) Ensure all policies and implementation plans for COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery and for achieving the SDGs are gender sensitive, and to ensure parity of women in planning, implementation and monitoring mechanisms. cc