**U N I T E D N A T I O N S**  **N A T I O N S U N I E S**

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS TO MEDIA ON**

**THE EFFECT OF THE**

**COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**ON CHILDREN**

**New York, 16 April 2020, 11:45**

As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads across the globe, we are seeing an alarming pattern.

The poorest and most vulnerable members of society are being hardest hit, both by the pandemic and the response.

I am especially concerned about the well-being of the world’s children.

Thankfully, children have so far been largely spared from the most severe symptoms of the disease.

But their lives are being totally upended.

I appeal to families everywhere, and leaders at all levels: protect our children.

Today we are launching a report that highlights the risks they face.

First, education.

Almost all students are now out of school.

Some schools are offering distance learning, but this is not available to all.

Children in countries with slow and expensive Internet services are severely disadvantaged.

Second, food.

A staggering 310 million schoolchildren – nearly half of the world’s total – rely on school for a regular source of daily nutrition.

Even before Covid-19 the world faced unacceptable rates of childhood malnutrition and stunting.

Third, safety.

With children out of school, their communities in lockdown and a global recession biting deeper, family stress levels are rising.

Children are both victims and witnesses of domestic violence and abuse.

With schools closed, an important early warning mechanism is missing.

There is also a danger that girls will drop out of school, leading to an increase in teenage pregnancies.

And we must not ignore the growing risks children are facing as they spend more time online.

This can leave children vulnerable to online sexual exploitation and grooming.

A lack of face-to-face contact with friends and partners may lead to heightened risk-taking such as sending sexualized images.

And increased and unstructured time online may expose children to potentially harmful and violent content as well as greater risk of cyberbullying.

Governments and parents all have a role in keeping children safe.

Social media companies have a special responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

Fourth, health.

Reduced household income will force poor families to cut back on essential health and food expenditures, particularly affecting children, pregnant women, and breastfeeding mothers.

Polio vaccination campaigns have been suspended.

Measles immunization campaigns have stopped in at least 23 countries.

And as health services become overwhelmed, sick children are less able to access care.

With the global recession gathering pace, there could be hundreds of thousands additional child deaths in 2020.

These are just some of the findings of the report we are issuing today.

Its conclusion is clear.

We must act now on each of these threats to our children.

Leaders must do everything in their power to cushion the impact of the pandemic.

What started as a public health emergency has snowballed into a formidable test for the global promise to leave no one behind.

The report urges governments and donors to prioritize education for all children.

It recommends they provide economic assistance, including cash transfers, to low-income families and minimize disruptions to social and healthcare services for children.

We must also prioritize the most vulnerable – children in conflict situations; child refugees and displaced persons; children living with disabilities.

Finally, we must commit to building back better by using the recovery from COVID-19 to pursue a more sustainable and inclusive economy and society in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

With the pandemic placing so many   
of the world’s children in jeopardy,   
I reiterate my urgent appeal: let us protect our children and safeguard their well-being.