



July 14, 2020

Steven Mnuchin  
Secretary of the Treasury  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20220

Brent McIntosh  
Under Secretary for International Affairs  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20220

**RE: Amnesty International Recommendations to G20 Finance Ministers for COVID-19 Recovery Measures and Debt Relief**

Dear Secretary Mnuchin and Under Secretary McIntosh:

On behalf of Amnesty International, a global, independent and non-partisan human rights organization with over 7 million supporters worldwide, including in the United States, I am writing to urge you to put human rights at the center of the agenda for the G20 meeting of Finance Ministers on July 18 - 19, 2020. Specifically, this would mean:

**1. Investing in People for a Just Recovery**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore pre-existing structural inequalities in our societies, which stem from the current economic, educational, social and labor order which continues to fuel and grow inequality. It has also laid bare that we are all only as safe as the most marginalized person amongst us. If we are to build resilience to future crises, we need to address existing inequalities – not just through crisis response but also long-term structural changes. Plans to recover from this crisis cannot, once again, be based on austerity measures introduced without adequate safeguards and due regard for human rights. G20 countries must demonstrate global leadership by investing in people and their wellbeing, leading the way to a just and inclusive recovery.

**2. Recovery with Climate at Its Centre**

In managing the economic fallout of the pandemic, responses must limit – rather than increase – global heating. Several countries, such as the US, UK, China and Russia, have already taken measures that support the fossil fuel

industry and other polluting industries, including by committing public money mostly with no conditions attached. Given the size of their economies and their contribution to the climate crisis, G20 states must lead in adopting stimulus packages and recovery measures that facilitate the transition to a zero-carbon economy and resilient society. At the same time, they must ensure the transition is just, and provide an adequate standard of living for all, including workers and communities dependent on sectors affected by the transition, people on lower incomes, those working in the informal sector, and others who may be at risk and most affected both by the COVID-19 crisis and the transition to decarbonize the economy.

### **3. International Cooperation and Assistance**

The G20 countries have the obligation to assist states that are struggling to mobilize adequate financial resources to respond to the pandemic. International development assistance should be increased, and not diverted from other areas of assistance. Obligations to repay existing sovereign debt must be reviewed to ensure that they do not prevent states from guaranteeing human rights. Debt repayments should not come at the cost of protecting livelihoods, and the rights to health, housing and to an adequate standard of living among other human rights during the pandemic, and the recovery.

Amnesty International is calling on the G20 to go beyond its currently agreed debt relief measures by cancelling the external sovereign debt payments in 2020 and 2021 of all countries needing such relief to respond to or recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by longer term debt sustainability discussions, with robust human rights impact assessments built in to ensure that the economic and social rights of all are guaranteed. In particular, this should include the 77 poorest countries. Debt cancellation should be accompanied by robust transparency and accountability mechanisms at the national level to ensure that money freed up is not lost to corruption or wasteful expenditure.

For more detailed recommendations on the above topics, please see the three enclosed briefings, which are also available online at the links below:

**1. COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE:**

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior30/2624/2020/en/>

**2. INVESTING IN PEOPLE: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS:** <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior30/2614/2020/en/>

**3. A JUST RECOVERY WITH CLIMATE AT ITS CENTER: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS:**

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ior30/2623/2020/en/>

I look forward to your response and would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to discuss these recommendations further. I may be reached on [dbell@aiusa.org](mailto:dbell@aiusa.org) and (917) 583-8584.

Sincerely,



Denise Bell  
Researcher  
Amnesty International USA

# COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS ON INVESTING IN PEOPLE FOR A JUST RECOVERY

Amnesty International is calling on G20 Finance Ministers to demonstrate global leadership by adopting bold plans at their meeting on 18-19 July 2020 that invests in people for a just recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic that respects the full range of human rights. We need to build a better future for all.

## INVESTING IN PEOPLE FOR A JUST RECOVERY AND A BETTER FUTURE

COVID-19 has highlighted our vulnerabilities as well as our inter-connectedness. It has brought to the fore pre-existing structural inequalities in our societies, which stem from the current economic, educational, social and labour order which continues to fuel and grow inequality. The pandemic has also highlighted the massive inequality between and within countries in their access to material and technical resources. While COVID-19 response measures have been implemented across many countries – many of which would have seemed unthinkable beforehand, such as measures to address homelessness or vast levels of social security support - their impact will be very different depending on the ability of the country to invest sufficiently in their economy, and their social security and health systems. Without urgent and targeted measures based on solidarity and international cooperation, there is a grave risk of mass unemployment, housing and health crises and even starvation in the countries with the fewest resources.

Those from the most marginalized groups, especially people with multiple and intersecting identities, are likely to be most at risk of infection as well as adverse consequences of the responses to the pandemic. This is true in both wealthy and low-income countries, where those who are homeless, displaced, in prisons or immigration detention centres, living in inadequate housing or refugee camps, and working in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions are at higher risk of being infected in the first place. In many countries, these are mainly people from ethnic minorities or people suffering structural discrimination, including on the basis of work and descent.<sup>1</sup>

The economic fallout from COVID-19 has been uneven and disproportionate, hitting workers in precarious employment hardest – especially in the informal sector and gig economy, including migrants, and those in supply chains in the Global South. There is a risk that countries will weakened labour standards in order to encourage investment and boost the economy.<sup>2</sup> As in other crises, women and girls risk being particularly and disproportionately impacted. Similarly, LGBTI people, Indigenous peoples, those discriminated based on descent and work, refugee and migrant communities, and people with disabilities, among others, and women and girls within these groups, are among those often ignored and denied a voice in public policy-making responses to crises and are therefore further marginalized. Older people and those with disabilities, even when not directly affected by the virus, often find themselves more isolated, and public health measures introduced in the context of COVID-19 may make access for many of these groups to essential needs and services, such as housing, water and sanitation, even more difficult than before.

The pandemic has laid bare that we are all only as safe as the most marginalized person amongst us. If we are to build resilience to future crises, we need to address existing inequalities – not just through crisis response but also long-term structural changes. Plans to recover from this crisis cannot, once again, be based on austerity measures introduced without adequate safeguards and due regard for human rights. Temporary measures to support people in accessing their economic and social rights during the pandemic, such as emergency temporary housing for those who are homeless, evictions moratoria and targeted economic support should form the foundation of the recovery. Maintenance of equivalent levels of economic and social rights protections during the recovery phase will be vital. G20 countries must lead the way to a just and inclusive recovery that puts the wellbeing of people and the planet at the centre. This would not be a

<sup>1</sup> Don Bambino, Geno Tai, Aditya Shah, Chyke A Dubeni, Irene G Sia, and Mark L Wieland, *The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the United States*, June 2020, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32562416/> and European Commission, OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS MEASURES ON THE MARGINALISED ROMA COMMUNITIES IN THE EU, 23 April 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/overview\\_of\\_covid19\\_and\\_roma\\_-\\_impact\\_-\\_measures\\_-\\_priorities\\_for\\_funding\\_-\\_23\\_04\\_2020.docx.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/overview_of_covid19_and_roma_-_impact_-_measures_-_priorities_for_funding_-_23_04_2020.docx.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Hindustan Times, *Some states put freeze on labour laws to get business going*, 9 May 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/some-states-freeze-labour-laws/story-6JMELEPdlugsHt8YIQ75vN.html>

handbrake on progress and innovation, but rather will build economies that are resilient, protect human rights and respect environmental boundaries. Without these changes, it will be impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which the G20 has committed to implementing.

Accountability should also be a crucial part of recovery from the pandemic so that states can learn lessons to ensure that any failure to adequately uphold human rights in their responses is not repeated in any future waves of the covid-19 pandemic, or any other mass disease outbreaks. Comprehensive, effective and independent reviews into pandemic preparedness should be carried out with effective and accessible remedies for any human rights violations established to have taken place,

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS

Amnesty International is making the following recommendations to member states of the G20 and to those invited to the 2020 process as they develop G20 COVID-19 Action Plans and national level recovery and economic stimulus packages:

### BUILD A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH A JUST RECOVERY BY INVESTING IN PEOPLE

- Urgently invest in health and social protection systems that foster equality and non-discrimination and provide access to adequate housing and essential services for everyone, including migrants and those forced to seek sanctuary in another country due to conflict and persecution in their own.
- Avoid austerity measures introduced without adequate safeguards and due regard for human rights.
- Take urgent measures to realise the G20 commitment to Universal Health Coverage by ensuring equal access to health care for all persons, free from discrimination. The inability to pay or immigration status should never be a barrier to equal access to health care.
- Create a new deal for social security:
  - Protect workers rights, and ensure they are valued and paid a fair wage – including migrant workers;
  - Ensure everyone is protected from loss of income including as a result of unemployment, old age, and sickness, and that care work is properly valued and compensated;
  - End homelessness and stop forced evictions, and ensure everyone can access affordable housing, adequate water and sanitation, and allocate the necessary financing to do so, building on temporary measures where these exist.
- Ensure that all measures meet women’s and girls’ specific needs and are adequately resourced to do so in line with the 2019 G20 commitment to “take further action to improve the quality of women's employment, reduce gender pay gaps, and end all forms of discrimination against women and combat stereotypes and to recognize women as agents of peace, and in the prevention and resolution of conflict”<sup>3</sup>;
  - Take urgent steps to implement the G20’s commitment to close the gender pay gap by 25% by 2025 by investing in women’s economic empowerment;
  - Provide public education and challenge gender norms to ensure ensure gender equality, including a more equal spread of the burden of unpaid care.
- Explicitly and publicly recognise the important role that human rights defenders play in responding to the pandemic, including the monitoring of government responses, and ensure they are protected from physical and verbal attack and enabled to carry out their important work.
- Ensure adequate budgetary support for comprehensive, effective and independent reviews into the level of G20 states’ pandemic preparedness and response with a view to learning lessons and providing remedy regarding any identified failures to adequately uphold human rights.

**COVID-19 is not only a health and economic, but also a human rights crisis. It has also shown us that governments are capable of urgent, fast, decisive and multi-sectorial action in the emergency response that protects economic, social and cultural rights. This is an opportunity for the G20 to demonstrate global leadership as we move from emergency to recovery, to create a “new normal”, that is just, fair and leaves no one behind.**

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<sup>3</sup> G20 Osaka Leaders’ Declaration, 29 June 2019, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2019/2019-g20-osaka-leaders-declaration.html>

# COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS ON A JUST RECOVERY WITH CLIMATE AT ITS CENTRE

Amnesty International is calling on G20 Finance Ministers to demonstrate global leadership by adopting bold plans at their meeting on 18-19 July 2020 for a just recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic with climate at its centre. We need to build a better future for all.

## A 'JUST RECOVERY' THAT PUTS PEOPLE AND CLIMATE AT THE CENTRE

COVID-19 has not pushed the climate emergency away. G20 states are responsible for almost 80% of greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> Although some of the measures taken to limit its spread have temporarily reduced greenhouse gas emissions, these reductions are only temporary and have not improved states' ability to limit the increase of global average temperatures to 1.5°C.<sup>2</sup> Responses to the pandemic risk exacerbating the climate crisis if they roll back environmental protections, unduly delay climate action, or entrench fossil fuel dependency. We must rethink our relationship to the environment, moving away from a solely exploitative model, and promote and implement the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a way to ensure that humans thrive as part of nature.

The decisions we take now will have huge implications for our future. We were already running out of time to tackle the climate crisis. Therefore, in managing the economic fallout of the pandemic, responses must limit - rather than increase - global heating. Given the size of their economies and their contribution to the climate crisis G20 states must lead in adopting stimulus packages and recovery measures that facilitate the transition to a zero-carbon economy and resilient society. At the same time, they must provide an adequate standard of living for all, including people on lower incomes, those working in the informal sector, and others who may be at risk and most affected both by the COVID-19 crisis and the transition to decarbonise the economy.

Fossil fuels and all unsustainable business practices must become a relic of the past. The G20 must provide leadership by expanding its commitment to end inefficient fossil fuel subsidies to include all fossil fuel subsidies without exception, by taxing the fossil fuel-derived profits of energy companies and by boosting investment in human rights-consistent renewable energy through targeted fiscal measures including subsidies. The G20 countries' failure to take all feasible steps within their available capacity to reduce emissions in the shortest possible time frame is putting the lives and human rights of billions at risk, and could violate their human rights obligations.<sup>3</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS

Amnesty International is making the following recommendations to member states of the G20 and to those invited to the 2020 process as they develop G20 COVID-19 Action Plans and national level recovery and economic stimulus packages:

<sup>1</sup> UNEP, Emission Gap Report 2019, <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2019>

<sup>2</sup> Atmospheric Co2 levels rise sharply despite Covid-19 lockdowns, The Guardian, 4 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jun/04/atmospheric-co2-levels-rise-sharply-despite-covid-19-lockdowns>

<sup>3</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *Committee releases statement on climate change and the Covenant*, 8 October 2018, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23691&LangID=E>

## PUT PEOPLE AND CLIMATE AT THE CENTRE OF ECONOMIC STIMULUS MEASURES FOR A JUST RECOVERY

In line with the G20's commitment to support an environmentally sustainable and inclusive recovery consistent with Agenda 2030<sup>4</sup>:

- Ensure that any economic stimulus packages for the formal or informal sector, including those that cover private corporations, include a requirement to prioritise support for workers over corporate profit
  - Any assistance to fossil fuel energy companies should be targeted at workers and the protection of their rights, and the maintenance of current services, rather than for new exploration and development;
  - Condition any such assistance with time bound commitments to phase out fossil fuels in line with the latest scientific advice;
  - Target any assistance to aviation companies at protection of workers' livelihoods and make it conditional on time-bound commitments to reduce emissions in absolute terms without relying on offsets, including by reducing the number of flights within a defined period;
- Invest in sectors that support a just transition to a zero-carbon economy and resilient society, creating green and decent jobs and opportunities:
  - Help workers and communities dependent on the fossil fuel industry and other sectors affected by the transition to access green and decent jobs and opportunities;
  - Ensure women, the most marginalized and those most impacted by the climate crisis have equal access to jobs and opportunities in the emerging zero-carbon sectors.
- End the use of all fossil fuels, take measures to reduce energy demand and shift to human rights-consistent renewable energy as quickly as possible.
  - Refrain from unconditionally bailing out fossil fuel energy and aviation companies that would entrench fossil fuel dependency;
  - End all (not just inefficient) fossil fuel subsidies, as soon as possible and well before 2025;
  - Adopt legislation requiring all energy producers within their jurisdiction to phase out all fossil fuels as soon as possible and no later than 2050 (with an immediate phase out of the dirtiest forms of fossil fuels, in particular coal, peat, fracking and tar sands);
  - Prohibit, in law and practice, further investments to expand fossil fuel exploration, extraction and production including the development of new infrastructure;
  - Stop financing fossil fuel projects in other countries;
  - Impose taxes on profits of energy companies derived from fossil fuels rather than consumers;
  - Provide subsidies for the development of renewable energy sources that respect human rights throughout the entire supply chain;
  - Adopt and implement laws obliging companies to respect human rights and conduct human rights and environmental due diligence on their global operations, value chains and business relationships and establishing civil and criminal liability for damage;
- Ensure transparency over recovery plans and facilitate diverse and public participation in shaping and influencing the recovery and the transition towards a zero-carbon economy, paying particular attention to the needs and voices of the most marginalized, those most impacted by the effects of the pandemic and the climate crisis;
- Explicitly and publicly recognise the important role that human rights defenders play in responding to the pandemic, including the monitoring of government responses in relation to climate, and ensure they are protected from physical and verbal attack and enabled carry out their important work.
- Increase international cooperation and assistance, and support developing countries' move towards zero-carbon economies at the speed we need while protecting people affected by climate impacts.
- Recognise the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment at the national level as well as in relevant G20 declarations and plans;
  - Support the global recognition of the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment by the UN.

**COVID-19 is not only a health and economic, but also a human rights crisis. It has also shown us that governments are capable of urgent, fast, decisive and multi-sectorial action in the emergency response that protects economic, social and cultural rights. This is an opportunity for the G20 to demonstrate global leadership as we move from emergency to recovery, to create a "new normal" that also addresses the climate crisis.**

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<sup>4</sup> G20 Action Plan – Supporting the Global Economy Through the COVID-19 Pandemic; 15 April 2020, [https://g20.org/en/media/Documents/G20\\_FMCBG\\_Communicu%C3%A99\\_EN%20\(2\).pdf](https://g20.org/en/media/Documents/G20_FMCBG_Communicu%C3%A99_EN%20(2).pdf)

# COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

Amnesty International is calling on G20 Finance Ministers to demonstrate global leadership by adopting bold plans at their meeting on 18-19 July 2020 for international cooperation and assistance to support the poorest states in implementing a just recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic that ensures that no one will be left behind. We need to build a better future for all.

## EXPANDING INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

There are many global initiatives that have estimated the amount of money that needs to be mobilized to mount an effective response to COVID-19. The UN has launched a US\$2 billion global [humanitarian response plan](#) “to fight COVID-19 in some of the world’s most vulnerable countries”. The [Global Preparedness Monitoring Board](#) (an independent body co-convened by the WHO and World Bank Group) estimates that “a minimum of US\$8bn of new funding is required immediately to address the most urgent threats posed by COVID-19”. UNCTAD has called for a “\$2.5 trillion coronavirus crisis package for developing countries”, and in his report on the [socio-economic impacts of COVID-19](#), the UN Secretary-General estimated that “A large-scale, coordinated and comprehensive multilateral response amounting to at least 10 per cent of global GDP” is needed. These estimates are likely to increase as the pandemic spreads and its impacts are felt more severely.

The vast majority of states, including 17 G20 members,<sup>1</sup> are party to human rights treaties that include the obligation of international cooperation and assistance, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. CESCR General Comment 14 states clearly that “given that some diseases are easily transmissible beyond the frontiers of a State, the international community has a collective responsibility to address this problem. The economically developed States parties have a special responsibility and interest to assist the poorer developing states in this regard”.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to supporting the development and distribution of diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines for COVID-19 in a manner that ensures equal access for all persons between and within countries, including through the ACT-Accelerator and the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), wealthier states such as the G20 have the obligation to assist states that are struggling to mobilise adequate financial resources to respond to the pandemic. International development assistance should be increased, and not diverted from other areas of assistance. Obligations to repay existing sovereign debt must be reviewed to ensure that they do not prevent states from ensuring access to essential levels of people’s health, livelihoods, and other human rights. Debt repayments should not come at the cost of protecting health, livelihoods and the right to an adequate standard of living during the pandemic, or the recovery.

Amnesty International is calling on the G20 to go beyond its currently agreed debt relief measures by cancelling the external sovereign debt payments in 2020 and 2021 of all countries needing such relief to respond to or recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by longer term debt sustainability discussions, with robust human rights impact assessments built in to ensure that the economic and social rights of

<sup>1</sup> All member states with the exception of Saudi Arabia and the USA have ratified the ICESCR; the USA has signed but not ratified it.

<sup>2</sup> CESCR General Comment 14, para. 40 (on health); CESCR General Comment No. 19, para 41 (on social security).



all are guaranteed. In particular, this should include the 77 poorest countries.<sup>3</sup> Debt cancellation should be accompanied by robust transparency and accountability mechanisms at the national level to ensure that money freed up is not lost to corruption or wasteful expenditure.

At the same time, the global nature of the pandemic has clearly illustrated the important role of multilateral institutions in coordinating a global response. This was recognized by G20 Health Ministers in their 2019 declaration, which recognized the need to strengthen WHO's central role and to ensure that the UN system has proper mechanisms in place to cope with a future global health crisis. It also explicitly supported the leadership and coordination of WHO in the event of Public Health Emergencies (PHE) of international concern as the central institution in the global health architecture and as the lead of the global health cluster including recognized benefits of sustained financing in support of the effective implementation of the Health Emergencies Program<sup>4</sup>. Even during the current global economic recession, multilateral and regional institutions must be supported, including financially, in their endeavours for the common good of humanity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS

Amnesty International is making the following recommendations to member states of the G20 and to those invited to the 2020 process as they develop G20 COVID-19 Action Plans and national level recovery and economic stimulus packages:

### INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

- Analyse the funding gaps in all pillars of the ACT-Accelerator on a regular basis and make financial commitments to fulfil them to enable less wealthy states to access any diagnostic, therapeutic or vaccine tools as needed, without diverting needed funds for international development assistance.
- Work with all partners in the ACT-Accelerator to ensure strong governance;
  - Include specific provisions in agreements with private companies receiving funding through the ACT-Accelerator to ensure that resulting health products are accessible, affordable and open to all, and build this into any Advance Market Commitments that are developed;
  - Require companies to provide transparent information about the actual costs they incur in development and production.
- Join the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) if not already a member.
- Cancel existing debt until the end of 2021 for all countries needing such relief to respond to or recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly the 77 poorest countries, and ensure longer term debt sustainability that enables debtor countries to guarantee the human rights of all without discrimination;
  - Put in place robust transparency and accountability mechanisms at the national level to ensure that money freed up through the cancellation of debt repayments is not lost to corruption or wasteful expenditure.
- Support multilateral institutions such as the UN and its relevant bodies such as the World Health Organization, and equivalent bodies at the regional level, including by paying all regular budget assessments at the earliest date possible;
  - Consider paying additional contributions, including to make up for contributions that less wealthy countries are unable to pay in the short term.
- Explicitly and publicly recognise the important role that human rights defenders play in responding to the pandemic, including the monitoring of government responses in relation to international cooperation and assistance, and ensure they are protected from physical and verbal attack and enabled carry out their important work.

**COVID-19 is not only a health and economic, but also a human rights crisis. It has also shown us that governments are capable of urgent, fast, decisive and multi-sectorial action in the emergency response that protects economic, social and cultural rights. This is an opportunity for the G20 to demonstrate global leadership on international cooperation and assistance as we move from emergency to recovery, to create a “new normal”, that is just, fair and leaves no one behind.**

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<sup>3</sup> As defined by the World Bank's International Development Association as 'lowest-income countries' or are on the UN list of least developed countries.

<sup>4</sup> Declaration: G20 Meeting of Health Ministers, 4 October 2018, Argentina, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2018/2018-10-04-health.html>