

**AS DELIVERED**  
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**“Launching the decade of action at a time of crisis — Keeping the focus on**  
**the SDGs while combatting COVID-19”**  
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Excellencies, at the General Assembly one year ago, we commemorated 30 years of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

In parallel, the UN Secretary-General announced that the year 2020 would be the start of a “decade of action and delivery” to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

And just a few months later, the world was irrevocably changed by COVID-19.

The pandemic has affected all of us.

It has altered the way we work...the way we hold meetings...the way we interact with our families and friends...the way our children learn. But children are also learning this the fastest.

It has also revealed the lingering inequalities that are preventing us from achieving the SDGs.

Especially for children and young people.

Preliminary data presents a troubling picture: 1.8 billion children globally affected by temporary school closures; disruptions in health, water and nutrition services that could lead to 6000 child deaths per day from preventable causes; increased threats of violence, abuse and exploitation. These are all daily realities faced by children as their countries take drastic measures to contain the virus.

All of these threats underscore the urgency and importance of our work on the SDGs — as governments, as institutions and as UN agencies.

But in many ways, the crisis is also bringing out the best in all of us.

We see it in the ways children and young people are creatively helping support their families, their elders and their peers through this challenging time.

We see it in the recent commitment<sup>1</sup> of 172 Member States and Permanent Observers to “*protect and prioritize children’s education, food, health and safety amid the COVID-19 Pandemic.*”

We see it in the generous donations from public and private sectors alike to support our work through this crisis.

We see it in the new joint work being scaled-up among our agencies — bringing to life our commitment to UN reform and “delivering as one.”

And we see it in a new global commitment to “build back better.”

One example of where we can build back better is education.

School closures have demonstrated that there is an urgent need— and great potential — for online learning.

We want to scale-up digital solutions and greater connectivity to reach every child. The goal is to have 500 million children and young people engaged in digital

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<sup>1</sup> From joint statement of the EU, the Group of LAC States and the Group of Friends.

learning by the end of 2021, the end of next year, — and 3.5 billion children and young people by 2030... our ‘decade of action.’

In short — the solutions we develop now to address COVID-19 are, in fact, the same solutions that can help us reach more people, more children, and more communities with the support they need to live in a world in which these goals become reality.

So let us use this moment to re-imagine together...

Health systems that can reach all people.

Water, sanitation and hygiene systems for every community.

Services and families that protect children from violence and abuse — protecting their physical and mental health.

And education for all.

Throughout, let us listen to and be guided by children and young people.

They are ready to shape a better, fairer, greener world for the future.

So let us support them now. Let's keep their rights front-and-centre. Let's invest in their dreams and futures.

Thank you.

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