



# Vatican COVID-19 Commission

## Executive summary: Security Taskforce



Bombed buildings in Yemen, by EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid



Pope Francis has asked the Vatican COVID-19 Commission to consider the key issues arising from the pandemic, and to reflect on what new approaches are needed to enable us to build a better future for everyone. This is the executive summary from Week 3 of the Commission's Security Taskforce.

## SEE: Coronavirus increases conflict

### You can't build peace on an empty stomach

The pandemic is causing suffering all over the world but in conflict zones – which have already experienced devastating bombing, corruption, mass migrations and lack of basic sanitary infrastructure – it has brought a further problem: **famine**.

Food shortages in conflict zones are caused by restrictions on food exports and we cannot ignore this, especially during a pandemic; it is the poorest and marginalised groups who usually pay the highest price for deliberate policies such as sanctions. Moreover, food is often **used as a weapon** and distributed to preferred groups, even during ceasefires. This impacts the **most vulnerable**: women, refugees, minorities.

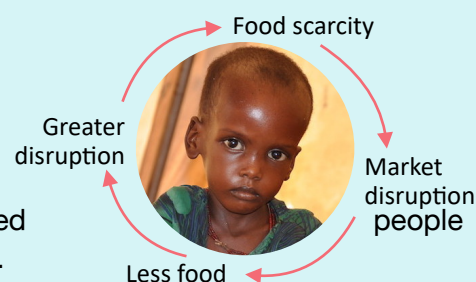
At the same time, hunger increases conflicts: It is harder to build peace in times of coronavirus when you have to **#stayathome** and all peace operations are suspended, leaving vulnerable civilians exposed to violence with almost no protection. In many countries affected by instability, civil war, economic crisis due to the dramatic decrease in oil prices, inflation etc, food insecurity made worse by coronavirus disruptions could be the straw that breaks the camel's back.

### COVID famine

The world is facing **widespread famine of 'biblical proportions'**. David Beasley, head of the World Food Programme, said that at least **265 million people** are being pushed to the brink of starvation by the COVID-19 crisis.

## Conflict and food: a vicious cycle

Food insecurity is both a cause and a consequence of conflict, creating a vicious cycle that is hard to break. Persistent conflicts and food insecurity are each responsible for driving millions of people to migrate away from their communities. Many forcibly displaced become refugees, contributing to rising food insecurity (source: IFPRI).



## JUDGE: The pandemic will cause greater hunger if we don't act

Food is a basic human right and we cannot let COVID-19 destroy it

We must not allow the pandemic to rescind efforts made by the UN to get to zero hunger by 2030. But as hunger and conflict are strongly connected, to avoid hunger we need to **implement a global ceasefire**. Feeding the victims of war requires that armed conflicts cease.

Actions undertaken by the UN, states and private donors are crucial but they will have **no impact** if arms production, modernisation and exports continue undeterred, even during the pandemic.

The ceasefire should be based on a **mutual and verifiable** process of disarmament. Can we build trust and multilateral institutions for food security if nuclear arsenals and biological weapons threaten millions of people? No.



Refugee baby, by UN Mission in South Sudan

**“Where will we find the resources to build peace with the upcoming economic crisis and one trillion dollars to be spent on modernising nuclear arsenals in the next 10 years?”**

Responding to the pandemic requires a **fundamental shift** from the ‘unjust normal’ of systemic and structural violence across the globe, from systems that destroy, dehumanize, and diminish, to a culture that **seeks the fullness of life for all**.

## ACT: Proposals for action

There is no time to waste.

When nationalistic trends and COVID-19 border closures are dividing the world, churches and faith-based groups are called to mobilize concrete networks of care and solidarity, at all possible levels, by:

1. **Connecting preaching and sermons** to food security issues;
2. Distributing videos and use their **media and communication** channels to provide information about COVID-19 and encouraging interreligious solidarity, especially in conflict zones;
3. **Funnelling aid** through the health care and humanitarian organizations which they run;
4. Providing pastoral and political support to food security by **promoting disarmament** – through appeals to freeze arms production and supply (such as the SCRAP initiative) and by asking states and corporations to reinvest part of the resources currently dedicated to arms production to food security instead;
5. Promoting multilateralism and the principles of integral human development, especially through UN channels, to support commitments to **ceasefires and conflict-sensitive aid**.



US Africa Command helicopters deliver food aid in Mozambique