



Vatican COVID-19 Commission

Executive summary: Security Taskforce



Photos: Above, Somali refugees, Kenya, by Giro 555, a partnership of Dutch aid organisations.
Below right, a refugee sewing programme, Jordan, by UN Women



Pope Francis has asked the Vatican COVID-19 Commission to consider key issues arising from the pandemic and also to reflect on what new socio-economic-cultural approaches are needed to build a better future for everyone. This is the executive summary from Week 4 of the Commission's Ecology Taskforce.



We need conflict sensitive aid

Conflict sensitive approaches are needed to build peace and food security. Eg, sewing livelihood programmes could be used to make face masks, improve women's livelihoods and build trust and social cohesion by distributing masks across conflict lines.

SEE: The poor are defenceless

Exposing the violence at the heart of food insecurity

The poor are defenceless in the face of conflicts and coronavirus-led famine. Before COVID-19, 135 million people were near the brink of starvation. By the end of 2020, the number at risk of starving to death could double to 265 million, equivalent to all of Indonesia, the fourth most populated country in the world.

The first regions likely to be affected by famine are those already caught in 'the conflict trap'. Some nations have closed their borders, leaving their populations completely exposed to the ravages of the virus. In others, armed groups prey vulnerable people as their own finance and supply chains are disrupted, taking advantage of a reduced security presence to launch attacks.

Famine's harshest impact will be on **the most vulnerable** – those exposed to violence as well as marginalised in policies and decisions, including women. The trillions of dollars being spent to fight the pandemic and the economic recession are not being distributed with a conflict-sensitive lens.

821 million

The number of people with chronic hunger who go to bed hungry every night, according to the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

135 million

The number of people who 'are marching towards the brink of starvation' – David Beasley, WFP director, 21 April 2020.

36 countries

where, in a worse case scenario, the WFP says we could see famine – a hunger pandemic is more devastating than the virus.

JUDGE: Wear conflict-sensitive lenses

Focus on the poorest

Ineffective government responses worsen social conflicts, but conflict-sensitive food and health initiatives can **build trust and social cohesion**, facilitating peacebuilding.

The term 'conflict sensitivity' refers to the design of relief and development programmes that respond to the needs of the victims of armed conflicts. In keeping with the Church's preferential option for the poor, relief agencies and peacebuilders should focus attention on those who are **most vulnerable and least resilient**.

Conflict sensitivity also involves concentrating attention on the **sources of hostility** in a conflict. For this reason, conflict sensitivity requires examining interreligious tensions and sectarian rivalries as part of analysing the situation.

As affirmed by His Holiness Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in their [joint declaration](#) on human fraternity in February 2019, where religious differences have contributed to a conflict or affect its resolution, **interreligious dialogue can bring stability** to peacebuilding efforts, including food security.

Likewise, along with Saint Jean Paul II, we can affirm: '[No peace without justice](#), no justice without



Photo: Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, by UN Women

forgiveness': a **just and sustainable peace requires forgiveness** to allay any lingering sense of grievance and establish reciprocity between former adversaries.

In the interest of building a sustainable peace, we must foster a 'culture of encounter' where men and women discover one another as members of one human family, and so share the one table of the Lord together.

Finally, as outlined in Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 [Caritas in Veritate](#), **generosity (gratuity) and communion** will be necessary to building a post-conflict economy in which everyone, whatever their religion or ethnicity, will find their right right to food satisfied.



Photo: USAID

ACT: Design conflict-sensitive aid programmes

When nationalistic trends and COVID-19 border closures are dividing the world, churches and faith-based groups are called to **help governments in incorporating conflict-sensitive policies in humanitarian aid and debt relief**:

- Governments should be encouraged to **invest funds in COVID-19 relief and food security programmes** using funds currently reserved for military security assistance.
- Governments must be urged to permit **food distribution by NGOs** as an essential service under COVID-19 restrictions. As a matter of urgency, they should call on the UN Security Council to reauthorise cross-border aid operations from northern Iraq into northeast Syria and, more generally, allow international aid actions to take place.
- Governments should reinforce and promote **multilateralism and the principles of integral human development**, especially through UN channels, to support commitments to ceasefires and conflict-sensitive aid to increase food security. To assist in this, the UN FAO has developed some useful food security [policy tools](#); its calls for an **international food coalition** are essential.