



A Network of People
Building Peace

A broader approach to security is needed: GPPAC Northeast Asia Statement on COVID-19

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GPPAC Northeast Asia, the regional network of civil society organisations part of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), held its first ever online meeting due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Besides its agenda, including the Ulaanbaatar Process - a Northeast Asian civil society dialogue mechanism established in 2015 to contribute to promoting regional peace, confidence and cooperation - the meeting also discussed the evolving and urgent situation of the pandemic that is paralyzing peoples' lives, causing the untimely deaths of tens of thousands peoples, and disrupting the normal activities of states and economies.

The events clearly demonstrate that in addition to the two basic threats to human species, i.e. nuclear weapons and the climate crisis, COVID-19 and possible other waves of pandemics present a clear and present danger to the world and to the wellbeing of peoples. This calls for a broader, enlightened self-interest approach to the security of states and peoples, redefining security to that which is human-centred. Further, this approach must be based on the principle of prevention: the current situation shows the urgent need for preventative measures such as strong public health care foundations and safety nets.

The main lesson to be drawn from this unfolding pandemic is that just as radiation knows no borders, nor do viruses. Perceptions of national and common security must be changed in this globalizing world, as security regarding these three basic threats is closely intertwined. Hence all states need to pool together their intellectual, material and other resources and share accumulated experiences to jointly address threats. This pandemic demonstrates the need for cooperation in establishing early detection and containment networks, researching vaccines and effective treatments, and producing the needed test kits and other supplies. It also shows that the first line of defense is the protection of health care workers, and the utter necessity of providing them with the needed tools to care for patients and to save lives.

If the practical answer to the nuclear threat is getting rid of the weapons under strict international control, the global response to the other two threats, and indeed to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals, is close cooperation between states and other stakeholders. The latest research demonstrates that the needed funding to address the health crisis, including undertaking needed research, providing protection to health care providers, procuring thousands of needed PPEs, ICU beds, ventilators, salaries for doctors and more can be drawn from the already excessive military expenditures of states. For this reason we call for a shift from warfare to health care, and for the prioritisation of human health and welfare over military exercises or activities.

It is of critical importance that as the Northeast Asian region and indeed the world faces this urgent challenge, we secure not division between states and peoples but coordination; not hatred or enmity but instead mutual trust and collaboration; and not economic closures and sanctions, but economic cooperation. In this regard, we must ensure that humanitarian support can be made beyond national borders and political interests, and therefore sanctions which impede

humanitarian efforts must be lifted. We support the call for a global ceasefire, so that the world can overcome the coronavirus. Close communication and coordination between governments and civil society is crucial for this purpose, and civil society stands ready to cooperate in such support, including with its resources, people, and expertise.

The new coronavirus was initially reported in Northeast Asia. As peacebuilders in the region, members of GPPAC Northeast Asia reflect upon this, and pledge to take concrete steps forward together. We recognise the need for a more robust civil society response and systems in our region, and will strive to strengthen civil channels for coordinated responses to future crises. The expertise of and lessons learned by citizens in this region should be shared for the common good. Global action, solidarity and international cooperation are needed more than ever to address this global pandemic, and to go beyond and change society for the better.