

“All protocols observed”

By Barbara Adams

A new phrase has gained traction in inter-governmental deliberations at the UN in the virtual world ushered in by COVID-19: “All protocols observed”. Many Member States begin their statements with this phrase that replaces the formality of recognizing lists of colleagues and Member States.

Additionally, COVID-19 has given momentum to the development of an “omnibus” UN General Assembly resolution titled: **Comprehensive and Coordinated Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic**. This has the potential to advance initiatives and new approaches and thinking. It also has the potential to overtake, bypass, reverse or replace the outcomes of policy deliberations separately negotiated and/or not housed explicitly in the COVID-19 Pandemic track.

This Omnibus Resolution is being guided by the co-coordinators for the General Assembly on COVID-19-related initiatives, the Permanent Representatives of Afghanistan and Croatia, who circulated a [zero draft](#) on 5 June.

The zero draft follows the standard format of preambular and operative paragraphs and each paragraph denotes how it has been sourced. Sources range from existing agreed language, to Secretary-General and UN policies and briefs, to “new” proposals (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 Sources for Covid-19 Omnibus Resolution - zero draft	# of times used	
	Preambular	Operative
New Language	6	6
Resolutions	11	14
Secretary-General policy briefings	0	4
References to Financing for Development	1	8
World Health Assembly	4	5

The operative paragraphs (OPs) are grouped into clusters: Multilateralism and Solidarity; Jointly Protecting; Recovering Together; Rebuilding Better; Partnerships, Commitments; and the Way Forward.

Excerpts from the Omnibus draft illustrate its range and reach that extend across the three pillars of the United Nations (see Figure 2).

The last cluster relies heavily on responses and action from “other stakeholders”, “relevant stakeholders” and “relevant actors” in addition to Member States. It even “urges intensified international cooperation” to include public-private partnerships as well as North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.

But nowhere does this cluster call for related accountability and reporting responsibilities of these “other stakeholders”.

Throughout the text one can detect or anticipate the influence of the G20 and the major economies, especially in the macroeconomic paras (OPs 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30). The reference to the use of special drawing rights, for example, is limited to: “supports the continued examination of the broader use...” (OP 30).

The draft does acknowledge that human rights are the essence of what makes inter-governmental agreements under the auspices of the UN qualitatively different from other deal-making fora at the global and regional levels (PP 5).

Yet the Omnibus Resolution draft is shockingly silent on the importance of public resources and fiscal space, essential for guaranteeing the full range of rights and provision of public goods, themselves referenced implicitly and explicitly in a number of paragraphs. It gives a nod to tax evasion (OP 29) and “Recognizes the role of extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good”, but it is silent on fiscal space and fiscal policy.

While the zero draft references the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, there is only one reference to transformative recovery/change (OP 33). Overcoming entrenched obstacles to systemic change and reversing incentives that favour the (old) status quo will be essential. Some paragraphs edge in that direction, many do not.

Figure 2

Excerpts from the zero draft

PP 1. *Recognizing* that the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the greatest global challenges in the history of the United Nations, and *expressing concern* about its impact on the loss of life and livelihoods, food insecurity and malnutrition, health and education, the disruption to economies and societies, and the exacerbation of economic and social inequalities within and between countries, which will reverse hard-won development gains and hamper progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals, within their given timeframes **(PP1&3 of 74/270; PP1 WHA; PP2 HRC PS);**

PP 5. *Reaffirming* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and other human rights instruments, and emphasizing the obligation of all States to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms while responding to the COVID-19 pandemic **(based on S-G’s brief on Human Rights, Rural Women, 74/126, PP2);**

PP 9. *Recognizing* the central role of the United Nations system in catalysing and coordinating the global response to COVID-19, and *also recognizing* the World Health Organization’s important role and its constitutional mandate to act, inter alia, as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work and its key leadership role within the broader United Nations response **(based on PP4 WHA resolution);**

PP 11. *Expressing* appreciation for the leadership of the Secretary-General and *welcoming* his Appeal for a Global Ceasefire, the release of all relevant UN reports and policy briefs on the

impacts of COVID-19, notably the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 and the UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19 **(new)**;

PP 12. *Recognizing* the vital role that non-governmental organizations, women's and community-based organizations, youth-led organizations, organizations of persons with disabilities, and the private sector play in the response and recovery **(new)**;

PP 14. *Deeply concerned* that the COVID-19 pandemic, due to its severe disruptions to societies, economies, global trade and travel, and food and agricultural systems, is having a devastating impact on sustainable development, including food security, nutrition and livelihoods, education and health service provision and access, especially for people in vulnerable situations and in countries in special situations, and is making the prospect of eradicating poverty, hunger and malnutrition in all forms by 2030 more difficult **(new)**;

PP 15. *Reaffirming* that the pandemic and related global economic and commodity price shocks could significantly increase the number of countries in or at risk of debt distress, and *deeply concerned* about the impact of high debt levels on countries' abilities to withstand the impact of the COVID-19 shock and to invest in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda **(based on P9 FFD)**

OP 4. *Urges* relevant actors, including religious leaders, to promote inclusion and unity in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to speak out and take action against stigmatization, discrimination, hate speech, ageism, xenophobia, racism or violence **(based on S-G's Policy Brief "COVID-19 and Human Rights")**;

OP 5. *Calls* on Member States to maintain the continued functioning of the health system in all relevant aspects, in accordance with national context and priorities, necessary for an effective public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other ongoing epidemics, and the uninterrupted and safe provision of population and individual level services, for, among others, communicable diseases, including by ensuring the continuation of undisrupted vaccination programs, neglected tropical disease prevention and control, non-communicable diseases, mental health, mother and child health and sexual and reproductive health and promotion, clean water and sanitation and improved nutrition for women and children recognizing in this regard the importance of increased domestic financing and development assistance where needed in the context of achieving Universal Health Coverage **(based on OP7.5 WHA)**;

OP 6. *Calls* on international organizations and other relevant stakeholders to support all countries, upon their request, in the implementation and review of their multi-sectoral national action plans and in strengthening their health systems to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in maintaining the safe provision of all other essential public health functions and services **(based on OP 8.1. WHA)**;

OP 9. *Encourages* Member States to work with relevant stakeholders to increase research and development funding for vaccines and medicines, leverage digital technologies, and strengthen scientific international cooperation in response to COVID-19 and to bolster coordination, including with the private sector, towards rapid development, manufacturing and distribution of diagnostics, antiviral medicines, personal protective equipment, medical

science- based treatment protocols and vaccines, adhering to the objectives of efficacy, safety, equity, accessibility, and affordability **(based on OP3 74/274)**;

OP 10. *Recognizes* the role of extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good for health in preventing, containing and stopping transmission in order to bring the pandemic to an end, once safe, quality, efficacious, effective, accessible and affordable medical- based treatment and vaccines are available **(based on OP 6. WHA)**;

OP 12. *Calls upon* Member States and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the movement of foods and food-production related items, maintain functioning food value chains, allow freedom of movement of agricultural and food workers to avoid food shortages, and provide adequate safety nets and assistance to minimize the negative effects of loss of livelihoods on food security and malnutrition **(based on P5 FFD; 74/2 OP70; AU Declaration on food security and nutrition, p. 4)**;

OP 14. *Calls upon* all Member States to explore ways to eliminate any impediment to the delivery and access of humanitarian assistance, including by the application of humanitarian exemptions to sanctions where they have negative impact on the capacity of States to respond efficiently, specifically in the acquisition of medical equipment and supplies to adequately treat their populations in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic **(new)**;

OP 15. *Calls* for ensuring specific protection for women, youth and children, as well as for the poor and the most vulnerable, including, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, homeless, refugees, internally displaced persons, minorities, migrants, institutionalized persons, people living with non-communicable diseases, especially cardiovascular conditions, people exposed to unsafe levels of air pollution and persons facing multiple intersecting forms of violence and discrimination, especially in the context of timely, universal, inclusive and equitable access to safe, quality, effective and affordable health care services, including diagnostics, medicine and vaccines and to leave no one behind **(based on the S-G's Policy Briefs)**;

OP 18. *Calls upon* Member States to integrate prevention, mitigation, and response efforts and reinforce plans and structures to counter the increase of sexual and gender-based violence, in online and offline contexts, as part of their COVID-19 responses, including by designating protection shelters, health and support services as well as legal protection as essential services for all women and girls **(based on UN Policy Brief on Women and COVID-19)**;

OP 19. *Calls upon* Member States to adopt measures to recognize and reduce women's and girls' disproportionate share of paid and unpaid care and domestic work and the feminization of poverty, which is exacerbated by COVID-19, including through labour policies, public services and social protection **(based on CSW63; policy brief on women and solidarity report)**;

OP 20. *Urges* Member States to ensure full, equal and meaningful participation in decision-making and equal access to leadership and representation in all spheres of society for all people, with a special emphasis on women, young people, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, older persons and other marginalized groups, and to fully respect, protect and fulfill existing commitments and obligations with respect to equal enjoyment of

their human rights and fundamental freedoms, as part of their COVID-19 response **(based on OP2 74/I.52; SG's policy briefs);**

OP 21. *Reemphasize* the importance of freedom of expression, safety of journalists, and access to accurate and timely information, as essential for public health purposes, as well as social cohesion, and calls on Member States to ensure the free flow of information, without suppression, while countering misinformation online and offline with accurate, clear and evidence-based information, and avoiding efforts that could result in censorship of protected speech, endangering human rights and the rule of law **(based on S-G's Policy Brief "COVID-19 and Human Rights");**

OP 22. *Calls upon* Member States to ensure that our efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda, for all people everywhere, will be accelerated by building more sustainable, peaceful, just, equitable, inclusive and resilient societies where no one is left behind in a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development, as determined by our leaders at the Sustainable Development Goals Summit;

OP 24. *Welcomes* the steps taken by the Group of 20 to provide a time-bound suspension of debt service payments for the poorest countries and by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to provide liquidity and other support measures to ease the debt burden of developing countries, and *recommends* all relevant actors to address debt vulnerabilities, through existing channels and mechanisms, in developing countries due to the pandemic **(based on P9 FFD; SG report on debt);**

OP 25. *Emphasizes* that the crisis provides an opportunity to address issues in the international debt architecture and the international financial system **(based FFD; debt report);**

OP 29. *Notes* the impact of corruption and illicit financial flows, including that caused by tax evasion and transnational organized crime, on the ability of countries to respond to and recover from COVID-19, and *calls upon* Member States to recommit to addressing the challenges of combating illicit financial flows and strengthening good practices on tax administration, assets return and recovery, including by enforcing existing obligations under the United Nations Convention against Corruption and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto, and to implement effective, inclusive and sustainable measures to prevent and combat corruption within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development **(based on PP12, OP6, OP11 74/206; P14 FFD);**

OP 30. *Calls upon* Member States and International Financial Institutions to provide liquidity in the financial system, especially in all developing countries, and *supports* the continued examination of the broader use of special drawing rights to enhance the resilience of the international monetary system **(based on shared responsibility report; OP26 74/202);**

OP 36. *Recognizes* that substantial digital divides and data inequalities exist between countries and regions, and between developed and developing countries, particularly Africa and least developed countries, and urges leaders to accelerate the catalytic role that digital technologies have played in ameliorating the impact of the crisis on education, health, communication, commerce and business continuity and to take concerted action to further

digital government, scientific research, emerging technologies and new data sources and to build resilient, integrated and agile data and statistical systems under the leadership of National Statistical Offices, that can respond to the increased and urgent data demands in times of disaster and ensure a path towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals **(based on 73/141)**;

OP 39. *Urges* intensified international cooperation, including North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, bearing in mind that South-South cooperation is not a substitute for, but rather a complement to, North-South cooperation, as well as public-private partnerships in response to the COVID-19 pandemic **(new)**;

OP 40. *Calls upon* Member States to engage all relevant stakeholders, including youth, civil society, human rights defenders, the private sector, and academia, through the establishment of participatory and transparent multi-stakeholder platforms and partnerships, to design effective responses and review and monitor their implementation **(based on 74/L.26, OP9)**;

OP 41. *Urges* Member States and other stakeholders, including the private sector and International Financial Institutions, to mobilize a global response amounting to the equivalent of, at least, 10 percent of global GDP **(based on S-G's report on shared responsibility of 2020)**

OP 43. *Urges* all relevant actors to align investments with the 2030 Agenda, including investments supporting progress towards universal health coverage and reduction of inequalities, to help ensure a sustainable recovery from COVID-19, as well as pandemic preparedness and the prevention and detection of and response to any future outbreak **(based on P16 FFD)**.

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