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COVID-19: Health care heroes need protection – UN expert

GENEVA (27 March 2020) – *States and businesses must urgently step up their efforts to ensure that health care workers fighting the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide receive adequate protective equipment, said Baskut Tuncak, UN Special Rapporteur on hazardous substances.*

"The brave doctors, nurses, emergency first-responders and other medical professionals working on the frontlines of the global fight against the coronavirus pandemic are heroes. Their tireless work and self-sacrifice show the best of humanity. They must be protected.

"Yet, unacceptable shortages in critical protective equipment continue to be a grave concern in nearly all countries battling the coronavirus.

"I applaud the many businesses that are rising to the challenge, producing much needed personal protective equipment for these health-care providers. These efforts are to be commended. But far more is needed around the world.

"Of particular concern is the inequality in the distribution of necessary personal protective equipment within and between countries. The COVID-19 situation in low-income countries is of grave concern. States must ensure that countries with fewer resources have the necessary protective equipment for all their health care providers.

"Public and private funds are urgently needed to ensure that protective equipment and other medical supplies are universally available and accessible. States and businesses should ensure that financial obstacles are removed and that supplies are provided at no cost for low-income countries.

"Hoarding of essential protective equipment, exploitation of demand or profiteering from the current crisis is abhorrent. States must take immediate measures to effectively deter such conduct.

"It is time to put aside our differences and to work together to protect the most vulnerable people from this virus, the elderly and those who bravely care for them: our health care workers."

ENDS

Mr. Baskut Tuncak is the [Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes](#).

The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the [Special Procedures](#) of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organisation and serve in their individual capacity.

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