



UN Security Council Resolution to COVID-19: Global Humanitarian Ceasefire Call

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The United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which has the duty and authority to maintain international peace and security under the Charter of the United Nations, unanimously adopted resolution 2532 (2020), “A Cessation of Hostilities, a Humanitarian Pause and Solidarity to face the COVID-19 Pandemic” on July 1, after three months of painstaking work. This would be the first document by the Security Council to discuss the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on international peace and security.

The members of the council demanded an “immediate cessation of hostilities in all situations,” pointing to on-going conflicts in Syria, Yemen, Libya, South Sudan, and the DRC. The purpose of calling for the warring parties “to engage immediately in a durable humanitarian pause for at least 90 consecutive days” and follow the humanitarian principles of “humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence” is to enable the safe, unhindered and sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance and, if necessary, to enable medical evacuations. Nonetheless, immediate cessation of hostilities and humanitarian pause do not apply to military operations against the Council-designated terrorist groups such as IS (Islamic State), Al-Qaida, and Al-Nusra Front.

The resolution was drafted by France, a permanent member, and Tunisia, a non-permanent member, after three months of seeking an agreement. For even the pandemic could not stop bloody conflicts, people cannot but wishfully welcome the resolution. However, that the Security Council adopted a resolution calling for a worldwide ceasefire after 111 days the WHO (World Health Organization) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic and after more than 500,000 deaths and 1 million confirmed cases, is rather regrettable. Three months passed since the U.N. Secretary-General Guterres appealed for a humanitarian “global ceasefire” (on March 23), following the global spread of COVID-19. 193 members of the United Nations General Assembly

had adopted two resolutions on COVID-19 in April (one to strengthen quarantine cooperation and another to develop vaccines and improve access to medical facilities).

The UNSC, which has the power to make decisions that member states are then obligated to implement under the Charter, failed to present a resolution until July 1 while the number of deaths due to the pandemic kept increasing. The United States and China, permanent members of the Security Council and thus states with veto powers, showed a wide gap in their positions on the origin and the spread responsibility of COVID-19 and the assessment of the WHO under the United Nations; they could have delayed the decision in the course of negotiations. In fact, in early April, President Trump had criticized the WHO for taking “China’s assurances to face value” and for failing to block the spread of the coronavirus from China and indicated that the U.S. would halt funding to the WHO. On May 19, President Trump listed the WHO’s failure to respond in time and discussed the Chinese government’s alleged concealment of information in a four-page letter to the WHO Secretary-General Ghebreyesus. He also expressed that the U.S. will reconsider its membership and permanently freeze funding, if the WHO does not make substantive improvements and demonstrate independence from China within 30 days. In other words, the U.S. was disappointed with and distrustful of not only China but also with the WHO in the wake of COVID-19. The U.S., therefore, hoped to discuss these issues in the UNSC’s first resolution on COVID-19. According to various sources of the United Nations, the U.S. intended to discuss the origin of COVID-19 and China’s transparency. However, China could not allow such. Instead, China tried to mention the WHO’s global role during the pandemic while the U.S. opposed to such.

Time passed, and the U.N. Secretary-General and the international community have consistently expressed their concerns. Eventually, on July 1, Resolution 2532 (2020) that does not mention either “transparency” or “the WHO” was unanimously adopted without any vetoes. Although the resolution was adopted unanimously, it was clear that the first resolution on the issue of COVID-19 confirmed that COVID-19 served as another major source of division between the U.S. and China.

The role of the Security Council does not end with the adoption of the resolution. For at least three months from now—by the end of September—current kinds of hostilities must be turned towards COVID-19, the common enemy. The United Nations and member states must monitor and support the process of transformation. The United Nations Secretary-General Guterres, who has been appealing for a global ceasefire for a while, immediately welcomed the resolution and described it as an important signal to warring parties. He called for members of the United Nations that are connected with current conflicts to double their efforts to reach peace. He indicated that he plans to work with the parties involved in order to realize actual ceasefire and afterwards establish a sustainable peace.

The resolution called for the Secretary-General to focus on preventing COVID-19. Firstly, it called for all organizations of the United Nations system in combat zones and humanitarian crisis areas to double their preventive measures against COVID-19 and report the progress. Second, it called for reports on the impact of COVID-19 on the performance of the UN peacekeeping mission and special political missions. Third, it called for the current 13 peacemaking operations to provide support to fight COVID-19 within their mission areas and capabilities. The resolution also called for equal and meaningful participation of women and youths as the global pandemic negatively affects women, girls, children, refugees, domestic refugees, the elderly, and the disabled disproportionately.

Although the UNSC's decision seems delayed, it is fortunate that it calls for a humanitarian ceasefire. Nevertheless, whether this resolution can prove as a true barometer of the "Security Council leadership" and "multilateral victory" is another question. Firstly, resolving a ceasefire to support humanitarianism during a global pandemic is not the only task that for the Security Council. Tasks remain for the UNSC to accept the lesson that in an event of an unknown virus in a particular country, an immediate and transparent disclosure and sincere attitude of international cooperation are needed to sustain the three pillars of the United Nations (human rights, development, and ways to contribute to international peace and security). It is regrettable that such lessons were not included in the first resolution addressing COVID-19. Secondly, what is more worrisome is that most of the ongoing civil wars in the Middle East and Africa are simultaneously linked with domestic animosity, regional hegemony, and superpowers. Most experts studying the UNSC analyzed that the geopolitical strategy of permanent members of the Security Council are often connected to these conflicts. It was, therefore, difficult to make a truce or end fighting. The Secretary-General of the United Nations called the endless conflicts in Libya, Syria, and Yemen "a storm" in his outlook for the year. It is hoped that the COVID-19 pandemic, which has terrorized humanity in 2020, and the Security Council's global ceasefire resolution without sanctions could halt the current flow of violence for at least 90 days and lead to a meaningful ceasefire and even an end of the war. I anticipate a "political will" and "capabilities" of the United Nations and the international community to this end. ❀

※ *Translator's note: This is a summarized unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

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