



23 March 2020

## Open letter to G20 Heads of State and Government

### Need for coordinated action by G20 leaders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic – an unprecedented health and economic crisis

We are writing to you on behalf of the Business Twenty (**B20**) the G20 Saudi Arabia engagement group representing business from all G20 members, and the International Chamber of Commerce (**ICC**), the institutional representative of over 45 million businesses, alongside the World Health Organisation (**WHO**), in pursuit of stopping the COVID-19 pandemic.

We welcome the recent announcement by the G20 Presidency to convene a virtual summit this coming week in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout. This will have a potentially massive impact on the health sector and especially on the poor and vulnerable, requiring important investments in social protection schemes. A common framework for co-ordinated global action is necessary to support the national priorities that most G20 governments have announced in the recent days.

In this context, we collectively call on G20 leaders to commit to:

#### Health issues

- ***Substantially improve experience sharing & monitoring.*** A pandemic of trans-border impact calls for the G20 to substantially improve information and experience sharing, and coordinated monitoring, not just among Ministers and health officials, but also city mayors and administrators.
- ***Ensure infection control and medical products reach the hands of those who need them the most.*** Export bans or limits on the free flow of all necessary medical supplies, medicines, disinfectant, soap and personal protective equipment are significantly hindering the global response effort. We note with severe concern the reported increase of export restrictions for essential health products. Given the globally integrated nature of medical supply chains, short-sighted trade restrictions will only exacerbate the potential long-term toll of a virus that crosses borders with ease.

- ***Use the private sector to support testing.*** Testing and contact tracing are essential to suppress and control the pandemic. To meet this need for testing, the private sector should be allowed and encouraged to support government services for both diagnostics and surveillance with mechanisms to assure quality and ensure reporting to national authorities.
- ***Ramp-up production of medical equipment & disinfectants.*** The G20 must substantially ramp-up domestic production of medical equipment and disinfectants to address severe shortages of protection essentials such as masks, soaps and sanitizers. Excess capacities in unrelated manufacturing sectors could be deployed for the urgent ramp-up. Governments must accelerate all regulatory approvals, such as licenses and certifications, to urgently meet this need.
- ***Ensure equitable access to essential medical supplies and health services.*** G20 leaders must do all they can to ensure the accessibility and affordability of necessary medical supplies, focusing on the major cost drivers as well as, where applicable and where significant to pricing, import taxes, quotas, anti-hoarding mechanisms, and other government-imposed costs as well as ensuring appropriate logistics & supply chains, such as air cargo facilities, remain operational. To complement these interventions, G20 leaders could commit to significantly enhanced cooperation to speed the development, trialing and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. A global mechanism to coordinate/streamline investments into research and development, prioritizing the most effective products, ensuring large scale manufacturing to enable equitable and affordable access to populations that need them and facilitating regulatory harmonization would help reduce the public health impact of this infection. Experience in other severe outbreaks and pandemics has demonstrated the need to ensure services for those needing chronic care are not disrupted.
- ***Increase international assistance.*** A crisis at home is no excuse to leave neediest behind and developing countries outside the G20 remain most vulnerable. We call on G20 leaders to significantly scale financial assistance to help the world's poorest countries deal with the likely effects of COVID-19 — both by increasing aid funding for public health programmes and broader social and economic interventions.

## **Economic Issues**

- ***Implement urgent short- and medium-term fiscal policy measures to support economic activity.*** Whilst understandably many of the measures which must be taken, particularly limiting people to people movement, will depress economic flows maintaining a base level of economic activity is critical. Given the extent to which monetary policy has already been heavily applied, now is the time for all governments to more clearly and directly apply all available fiscal levers to

support their economies and ensure a base level of activity within the constraints imposed.

- ***Resolve pending & avoid new trade issues:*** COVID-19 has severely affected the global value chains. Jumpstarting the global economy and reinstating confidence in markets will require the G20 to resolve priority pending trade issues and avoid new ones. We urge G20 leaders to request their trade ministers to identify outstanding issues and make progress in their resolution at the next meeting of trade ministers.
- ***Prioritize direct support to small businesses and workers.*** Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises – which form the backbone of the world economy and account for upwards of 80% of employment in many countries – will be the hardest hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19. We call on G20 leaders to commit to urgent stimulus and safeguard measures to support MSMEs and avoid rampant unemployment. We must maintain the viability of the millions of small businesses across the world upon which so many workers and families rely. An urgent scaling of social protection for displaced workers must also be agreed.
- ***Urgently scale-up social protection for displaced & affected workers.*** G20 leaders must urgently scale-up social protection, which should include a daily allowance, deferment of credit repayments and other liabilities, for workers displaced and affected due to shutdowns and lockdowns, and those infected by the COVID-19.

We reiterate our firm view that only effective global cooperation can contain the potential human and economic toll of COVID-19. The limits of inward-looking policies are already patently clear. Global business is already mobilising at scale in many domains, but your political leadership is urgently required.

Yours faithfully,



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B20 Saudi Arabia Chair



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WHO Director General



John W.H. Denton AO  
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