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| <b>Forum:</b> | General Assembly 3 (SOCHUM)                         |
| <b>Issue:</b> | Addressing inequalities caused by Novel Coronavirus |
| <b>Chair:</b> | Stevin Yang, President                              |

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## Introduction

When the deadliest pandemic in modern-day history, the Black Death, travelled from Asia to Europe, it left Europe in ruins. The plague killed more than 20 million people, devastating European society and altering the course of European history. However, even though the pandemic left Europe in shatters, it managed to heavily reduce the inequality that many Europeans were facing at the time. While this was most likely not the predicted effect of the Black Death, many Europeans were able to experience equality for the first time in their lives. Since the disease left so many dead, labor became increasingly hard to find. As a result, workers were able to experience the luxury of higher wages, and many peasants were able to see the abolition of serfdom, allowing them to gain their freedom from their masters. After the pandemic, studies have shown that the richest 10% of the population lost between 15% to 20% of their overall wealth, thus reducing wealth inequality in Europe. While the Black Death did significantly reduce wealth and social inequality in Europe, times have changed. As inequality was at an all time high before the COVID-19 pandemic, it may seem that it will continue to be that way even after the novel coronavirus vanishes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has truly revealed the high and rising economic inequality around the world. Low income constituents are more vulnerable to health risks and are more likely to experience job losses and declines in well-being. In the pandemic, small businesses have already been affected, and as a result many people were laid off, thereby worsening the unemployment rate. It can be seen that both income and wealth inequality has risen over the past several decades, especially in the United States. The rich continue to get richer while the poor remain poor. Those with middle-class incomes have been “squeezed” and the typical worker has seen stagnant wages over the years. The rising inequality that has resulted from the

pandemic has hindered economic growth by slowing productivity growth and depressing aggregate demand.

Furthermore, rising inequality has excited social discontent, political divisions, and even to a certain extent extreme nationalism. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed dramatic inequities in technology access and utilization. In the pandemic, not everyone in the world has access to high-speed broadband for education, online shopping, etc. This means that people around the world have to find alternative methods to receive their education in a time of ensuing chaos. These types of inequities are intolerable injustices that create nearly insoluble gaps with dangerous social and economic consequences. This could ultimately result in increased income inequality, and widen the opportunity gaps between social groups.

Moreover, the world has begun to see a new revolution. A revolution that combats racial inequality around the world, but most prominently in the United States of America. The Black Lives Matter Movement, sparked by the killing of George Floyd, has turned into a global movement. It has helped raise awareness about the present day struggles for African Americans as they fight for equality. Through social media platforms and constant protests, the Black Lives Matter Movement have been able to effectively facilitate and convey their message to the world. Countries worldwide have viewed this movement as an opportunity to reexamine their policies regarding policing. Protesters around the world have brought down symbolic figures linked to colonialism, hoping to show to the government that it's time for racial equality. While this movement has just begun, it has indubitably helped the African American community, and bring attention to the crucial issue of racial inequality.

## Definition of Key Terms

### **Pandemic**

An epidemic occurring on a scale that crosses international boundaries, affecting people on a worldwide scale. A disease or condition is not a pandemic merely due to it being widespread or the death of many people; it must also be infectious. As of right now, the current COVID-19 pandemic has caused discord worldwide. There have been 95 million coronavirus cases and 2 million deaths, making this pandemic one of the worst in history.

### **Gender Inequality**

Gender inequality is defined as the social process by which people are treated differently and at a disadvantage on the basis of gender. Amidst the Covid 19 Pandemic, prejudice and violence against women have increased. School closures, overburdened healthcare systems and social distancing measures have increased the burden of women's unpaid care and domestic loads at home. Since women now have more caring work at home, this means that more women have been forced to scale down or even leave the workforce.

### **Racial Inequality**

The social process by which people are treated differently and at a disadvantage on the basis of one's race. Data have demonstrated that people of color - especially Black and Native American people - are contracting and dying from COVID 19 at a much faster and higher rate than their white counterparts. Occupational segregation and employment discrimination have long restricted people of color to jobs with lower wages, less security, and less benefits. Without action, the pandemic could exacerbate the situation by deepening and prolonging economic hardship in communities across the world.

### **Technological Inequality**

Technological inequality refers to when some members of a community are at a technological disadvantage as they may not have access to some forms of technology. Not everyone in the world has access to high-speed internet or technology utilization. As a result, many people in the world lose their ability to communicate with the online community and lack the necessities to participate in online events or schools.

### **Income Inequality**

Income inequality is how unevenly income is distributed throughout a country or population. The less equal the distribution of income is, the higher the income inequality. As small businesses or companies are unable to provide a sustainable income for their employees, many of the workers end up becoming unemployed. This means that these laid off workers now lose their source of income, and the disparity of income inequality continues to deepen.

### **Wealth Inequality**

Wealth inequality is a direct result of income inequality. When people are unable to accumulate wealth from their income, this leads to a widening of wealth inequality. In the Covid

19 Pandemic, where workers are getting laid off or unable to provide an adequate income for themselves, the rich get richer, while the poor get poorer.

## Background Information

### COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 Pandemic first began in Wuhan, China. The earliest known case of infection occurred on November 17th, where the virus was rumored to have begun spreading in a local market. Since then, the COVID-19 has continued to spread throughout the world, killing the lives of countless people. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern in January 2020 and a pandemic in March 2020.

Since the pandemic began in March, there have been more than 90 million cases of coronavirus worldwide. While some countries have gone through lockdowns such as the US or the United Kingdom, many places around the world have returned to living their normal life. While it will take time for countries to return back to the way it was prior to the pandemic, our society and the economy has shown to be recovering positively.

Nonetheless, the disastrous consequences of the pandemic is still evident throughout each individual nation. Millions of people worldwide are at risk of falling into poverty, and the number of undernourished people have been increasing at a fast rate. Small businesses were severely affected by the pandemic, where 41.3% of businesses reported that they were temporarily closed in the United States. The most affected countries, however, are third world countries. Not only are these countries facing significant economic slowdown, but they lack the resources and capability to protect their citizens from the virus.

### Inequality prior to the Pandemic

#### *Wealth Inequality*

The last 4 decades have brought upon a massive redistribution of wealth to those at the top. While the rich continued to grow richer, hundreds of millions of people continued to live in extreme poverty. There are more billionaires now than there ever have been, and the world's poorest just got poorer. Billionaires have more wealth than 4.6 billion people, while 735 million people continue to be impoverished. For example, the most visible

indicator of wealth inequality can be seen in America. The top three richest men in the United States of America have a combined net worth of more than the total wealth of the poorest half of Americans. The reason why wealth inequality exists is due to the direct consequence of certain government policies. Many governments tend to under tax the rich, and instead, the burden of taxes have been placed heavily on working people. The wealth from the rich comes from the appreciation of their companies or their real estate, which go untaxed. This ultimately means that the working class will have less money to be put towards essential services like healthcare and education.

### ***Racial Inequality***

The idea of racial inequality can be traced back to the beginning of times. The most notable example of when racial inequality existed was when African Americans were forced into chattel slavery for 246 years. While times have changed, these inequalities still exist today.

Many communities who have been discriminated against have been seen suffering harsh economic conditions even before the pandemic first began. Low levels of income and wealth, high unemployment rates for these groups, and high levels of food shortages all left these groups vulnerable prior to the pandemic. Higher rates of preexisting health conditions and lacking the ability for healthcare have left racially profiled groups like African Americans with higher mortality rates. According to an analytical report, an additional 1 million white Americans would have to die during 2020 in order for their life expectancy to fall down to the best-ever levels recorded for Black Americans. Moreover, historic discrimination policies against groups like African Americans have limited their ability to accumulate wealth in society, and thus worsening racial inequality further. Studies have shown that the median net worth for white households have been much greater than that of black households through both recessions and booms over the last three decades.

### ***Gender Inequality***

Gender inequality can be seen everyday, whether it may be in their homes, communities, or even in the media. However, gender discrimination was an issue long before COVID-19. In some countries, laws, policies, and religion have perpetuated the issue of gender discrimination. For example, in Egypt, there are no laws that criminalize domestic violence and the protection of women from violence in their own homes. In the UK, women were already more likely to be living in poverty before March 2020. However, despite these hurdles, women

have found different ways to raise their voices and surpass these obstacles over the years. There are now more girls attending and completing school worldwide. There are more movements led by female leaders that are advocating for the stopping of child marriage and female genital mutilation. Finally, we see the emergence of new female leaders in global affairs such as President Tsai Ing-Wen of Taiwan, who have statistically and systematically proven to be better at handling the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### United States of America

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed America's internal struggle. Their lack of ability to respond accordingly to the COVID-19 pandemic and the arrival of the Black Lives Matter movement has exposed America's lack of unity and its fallen tragedy. America now has roughly 24 million coronavirus cases and is now averaging nearly 250,000 coronavirus cases each day. The citizens of America not wearing masks, and the early reopening of states have all contributed to their crisis. Despite this, however, the global community bears the responsibility for amending the plight of a nation. With the continuation of protests for equality and justice as well as social unrest on the streets of America, it would be extremely catastrophic if the world sees an even bigger surge in their coronavirus cases.

### China

The coronavirus first surfaced in a local market in the city of Wuhan. Over the course of 2020, the virus has spread to more than 180 countries and taken the lives of more than 2 million people. While China is supposedly to blame for the pandemic, China has responded well to their outbreaks. During China's first outbreak in Wuhan, authorities implemented different measures to contain the virus in the Hubei province. Later on, many citizens in China were in lockdown, and only to leave their homes when needing to get food or medical help. China was able to do such a successful job in combating the virus that the World Health Organization congratulated China on a "unique and unprecedented public health response [that] reversed the escalating cases".

### Taiwan

Whether countries may recognize Taiwan as its own sovereign state or not, there is without doubt that Taiwan has been successful in controlling the pandemic. When the first case of

coronavirus was declared on January 21, 2020, Taiwan implemented several measures to ensure the safety of their citizens. All civilians were required to wear masks on public transportation and those who neglected these laws were fined. However, even though Taiwan has been one of the few countries in the world to “beat the coronavirus”, their efforts in the international community have been disregarded. When Taiwan attempted to warn the World Health Organization about the fact that coronavirus could be transmitted between people, they were overlooked. Even though Taiwan was neglected by the international community, Taiwan has still been able to handle the coronavirus better than most of the other nations.

### **United Kingdom**

As of right now, the United Kingdom has had 3.4 million confirmed cases of the coronavirus. The UK have had three national lockdowns, and all of the UK is now under strict virus curbs. With the emergence of the new coronavirus variant in European countries like the UK, it is time for the international community to unite and combat the virus. As a consequence of the pandemic, the British economy has taken a sudden hit. To alleviate the economic situation, Prime Minister Boris Johnson has promised an “infrastructure revolution” in an effort to rejuvenate the plummeting economy. He said that the government has set out plans to accelerate 5 billion pounds of spending on these infrastructure projects.

### **World Health Organization (WHO)**

The World Health Organization (WHO) is an agency under the United Nations that is responsible for international public health. While the World Health Organization has been successful in the past like the development of an Ebola vaccine, they have not responded well to the coronavirus pandemic. At a period of time when global health leadership needed to be taken, they have failed miserably. Back in January, when the virus was first spreading, the WHO ignored Taiwan’s early warning that transmission was possible through human contact. On top of that, by the time the WHO labelled the epidemic a public-health emergency on January 30, the virus had already spread rapidly throughout the world. When the WHO finally declared the coronavirus a global pandemic, it was already too late.

### **UN Women**

For many years, the United Nations has faced multiple obstacles when trying to promote gender equality all around the globe. Thus, in July 2010, the UN General Assembly called for the creation of UN Women. The UN Women is a United Nations entity that works toward the

empowerment of women. UN Women focuses on creating a framework of standards, strengthening national laws, and intergovernmental agreements. The organization has been successful in strengthening women's leadership and participation in peace and security around the world. However, even though UN Women have benefitted countless women across the world, gender inequality is still a prominent issue everywhere.

### **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is a civil rights organization in the United States dedicated to empowering African Americans and ensuring the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights for them. It's main goal is to end discrimination and guarantee equality for colored people. It was founded in 1909 to advance justice for African Americans in response to the ongoing prejudice that many black people were facing at the time. It is currently one of the largest and leading civil rights organizations in the United States. One of their most important accomplishments was when they played a huge role in the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of education.

### **Kiva**

Kiva is a nonprofit organization, founded in 2005, that hopes to give financial access to communities at a disadvantage. The organization aims to unlock capital for the disadvantaged, and improve both the quality and cost of financial services. Kiva loans money to people who have hopes of becoming entrepreneurs and the nonprofit has agreed to not receive any interest, thus allowing lenders to fully utilize their loans. So far, it has loaned money in more than 80 countries who are often financially excluded and don't have affordable sources of credit. In response to the ongoing pandemic, they have provided loans that are essential for economic support so borrowers are able to overcome the financial hardships caused by the pandemic.

### **Timeline of Events**

The timeline below is to address the history of COVID-19:

| <b>Date</b>       | <b>Description of event</b>   |
|-------------------|---|
| December 31, 2019 | Chinese authorities treated dozens of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause |
| January 11, 2020  | Chinese media reported the first known death from an unknown illness      |



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| January 20, 2020   | Countries like US, Japan, and South Korea confirm their first cases |
| January 23, 2020   | Wuhan is cut off by Chinese authorities and begins their lockdown   |
| January 30, 2020   | The World Health Organization declares a “public health emergency”  |
| February 2, 2020   | First coronavirus death reported outside of China                   |
| February 11, 2020  | The disease is officially called COVID-19                           |
| March 26, 2020     | The US officially begins to lead the world in confirmed cases       |
| April 26, 2020     | The global death toll passes 200,000                                |
| June 30, 2020      | The EU prepares to reopen its borders                               |
| August 22, 2020    | The global death toll surpasses 800,000                             |
| September 22, 2020 | COVID-19 kills more than one million people worldwide               |
| December 11, 2020  | The F.D.A approves a vaccine made by Pfizer                         |
| December 18, 2020  | The F.D.A. approves Moderna’s covid vaccine                         |

## Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- Women in development, 22 December 2015 **(A/70/476/Add.2)**
- Global efforts for the total elimination of racism, 20 December 2012 **(A/67/455)**
- Global efforts for the total elimination of racism, 18 December 2013 **(A/68/454)**
- Women and peace and security, 31 October 2000 **(S/RES/1325)**
- Comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus disease pandemic, 10 September 2020 **(A/74/L.92)**
- United response against global health threats: combating COVID-19, 14 April, 2020 **(A/74/L.57)**

## Possible Solutions

### *Governmental Policy Reforms*

The reason why many of these inequalities exist is because of the government. These governmental policies have forced many people to be the victims of inequality. In order to properly address inequality, newly reformed governmental policies must be created to alleviate

the consequences of inequality. For example, one possible solution to racial wealth inequality is for the government to reform the taxation of income from wealth. By amending their policies, the wealthy will be taxed at a higher rate, and the money collected can be redistributed to improve the lives of the poor. However, it is important to note that even though reformation is needed, ultimately, the implementation of new governmental policies are up to the jurisdiction of the government.

### ***Creation Of Organizations Dedicated To Reducing Inequality***

Although it is true that there are already existing governmental organizations dedicated to reducing inequality, many of these organizations not only lack the funding, but they haven't made significant contributions to reducing inequality. With the creation of new organizations dedicated to tackling specific inequality issues like UN Women, they can specifically target and reduce inequality in their own respective areas.

### ***Gathering Medical Supplies***

Many developing and underdeveloped countries face massive shortages of medical gear. Without proper medical supplies, countries lack the ability to properly address the issue of inequality. They cannot send officials to work with NGOs or the citizens in helping to reduce inequality. Thus, countries who are in need of medical supplies must be given it to address the issue of inequality amidst the pandemic. The UN has already launched "solidarity flights", which calls for charter planes to ship millions of face masks, goggles, gloves, and other medical supplies to underdeveloped countries who are in desperate need of medical supplies.

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