The pandemic’s public health emergency is set to exacerbate the abuse and exploitation of children. Trapped in homes to escape the virus, children are at greater risk of sexual abuse (offline and online) and domestic violence. Online child pornography is already growing, while traffickers are planning to exploit families once lockdowns are lifted. Beyond the impact of the public health crisis on marginalised communities, the economic impact is likely to trap more girls and boys in child labour. For example, school closures during the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa from 2014 to 2016, contributed to spikes in child labour, neglect, sexual abuse and teenage pregnancies. The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2009 global economic crisis have shown that more children are likely to be forced into child labour and trafficking, particularly in countries that have little or no social protection. As restrictions are lifted in countries, children will be trafficked, forced out of school and into labour, bearing the burden of sustaining their families. In addition, the World Bank has found that, for every additional year of secondary school, the likelihood of marrying before 

We, the Laureates and Leaders for Children, call upon the world’s Heads of Government to demonstrate wise leadership and to urgently care for the impoverished and the marginalised. Decisions made by our leaders, actions taken by us and the discourses that ensue in the next few weeks will be crucial. They are going to shape the future of polity, economy, culture and morality. Development priorities will be recalibrated, individual freedom, privacy and human rights will be redefined. We must take this opportunity to transform traditional diplomacy and politics into compassionate politics.

COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities in our world. While this virus does not differentiate between nationalities, religions or cultures, it is most adversely impacting those who are already marginalised – the poor, women and girls, daily wage earners, migrant labourers, indigenous peoples, victims of trafficking and slavery, child labourers, people on the move (refugees, internally displaced and others), the homeless, differently abled people, among others. The virus, restrictions placed on the majority of the world’s population, and the aftermath will have a devastating impact on the most vulnerable amongst us.

The pandemic’s public health emergency is set to exacerbate the abuse and exploitation of children. Trapped in homes to escape the virus, children are at greater risk of sexual abuse (offline and online) and domestic violence. Online child pornography is already growing, while traffickers are planning to exploit families once lockdowns are lifted. Beyond the impact of the public health crisis on marginalised communities, the economic impact is likely to trap more girls and boys in child labour. For example, school closures during the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa from 2014 to 2016, contributed to spikes in child labour, neglect, sexual abuse and teenage pregnancies. The 1997 Asian financial crisis and the 2009 global economic crisis have shown that more children are likely to be forced into child labour and trafficking, particularly in countries that have little or no social protection. As restrictions are lifted in countries, children will be trafficked, forced out of school and into labour, bearing the burden of sustaining their families. In addition, the World Bank has found that, for every additional year of secondary school, the likelihood of marrying before
age 18 decreases by five percentage points or more. With more than 90% of the world’s student population out of school due to school closures (as of 22 April 2020), child marriage rates are also anticipated to increase.

Currently, nearly one in every five children worldwide lives on under $2 a day. The World Bank announced on April 20th that it estimates COVID-19 will push 40 to 60 million people into extreme poverty in 2020. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has reported that tens of millions of informal workers have already become unemployed, with widespread problems with the food supply in poorer communities across the world. Governments need to do more to prevent devastating nutrition and health consequence for the 370 million children missing out on school meals amid school closures. These compounding factors mean that marginalised children are already going hungry and could starve.

Over the last several weeks, policy makers released more than US$5 trillion in emergency support for the companies and people in the richest countries. That funding is needed and is important, but we also need to see the governments of the world come together and announce a rescue package for the most marginalised children. If, for once, our world gave the most marginalised children and their families their fair share – 20% of the COVID-19 response for the poorest 20% of humanity – the results would be transformative. One trillion dollars would fund all outstanding UN and charity COVID-19 appeals, cancel two years of all debt repayments from low-income countries, and fund two years of the global gap to meet the SDGs on health, water and sanitation, and education – a vital step, as quality education is the most powerful way to end exclusion and change the future for marginalised children. There would still be enough left to fund social protection safety nets which are crucial in the fight against child labour. More than ten million lives would be saved; a positive response by humanity to the tragedy of COVID-19. We urge that the necessary resources be made available through national governments and international and regional financial institutions.

We anticipate that the numbers of the most marginalised will grow. We must prevent the fallout of COVID-19 being borne by the world’s children. Poverty and hunger, child labour, child marriages, child slavery, child trafficking and children on the move will likely increase during and after COVID-19. We need to ensure that the most marginalised do not fall off the world’s radar. Post-COVID-19, we must strengthen institutional responses to such future catastrophes, and improve the existing child protection infrastructure. Cash transfers and ensuring food security for the marginalised, improving hygiene and sanitation, a robust healthcare system and promoting a free and equitable education system with free school meals will be critical.

While we acknowledge initial measures taken by the G20, as Laureates and Leaders for Children, fighting for the most vulnerable children in the world’s poorest countries, we call on leaders of the G20 to take additional action beyond their own borders for those who urgently need coordinated international aid. We also call on all G20 leaders to honour existing global health commitments, including quickly working together and with stakeholders to close the financing gap in the WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan. The WHO has played a vital role in supporting basic healthcare in less developed regions of the world. Regional institutions, such as the Organization of American States, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Economic Community of West African States, the Arab League and others must also step up in this space.

All nations must unite in this effort to protect the most vulnerable and globalise compassion by taking this moment as an opportunity to innovate and develop new, transformative and sustainable solutions to eradicate child labour, trafficking and slavery, and ensure education for all. If we do not do this, we

2. This includes innovative instruments like IFFEd, GAVI and CEPI.
will lose a generation of children. If children are not safeguarded everywhere, then our global response to this crisis and beyond will have failed everywhere.

In solidarity for all our children,

Name of Signatories (by alpha order)

| 1) | HH the 14th Dalai Lama |
|    | 1989 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 2) | Most Reverend Archbishop Desmond Tutu |
|    | 1984 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 3) | Prof. Elizabeth Blackburn |
|    | 2009 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine |
| 4) | Prof Mario R. Capecchi |
|    | 2007 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine |
| 5) | Prof. Aaron Ciechanover |
|    | 2004 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 6) | Mdm Lisa Clark and Mr. Philip Jennings |
|    | Co-Presidents, International Peace Bureau |
|    | 1910 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 7) | Prof. Robert F. Curl Jr. |
|    | 1996 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 8) | HE F. W. de Klerk |
|    | 1993 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 9) | Prof. Johann Deisenhofer |
|    | 1988 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 10) | Mdm Shirin Ebadi |
|    | 2003 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 11) | Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei |
|    | 2005 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 12) | Prof. Joachim Frank |
|    | 2017 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 13) | Mdm Leymah Gbowee |
|    | 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 14) | Prof. Sheldon Lee Glashow |
|    | 1979 Nobel Laureate in Physics |
| 15) | Prof. David J. Gross |
|    | 2004 Nobel Laureate in Physics |
| 16) | Prof. Serge Haroche |
|    | 2012 Nobel Laureate in Physics |
| 17) | Prof. Oliver Hart |
|    | 2016 Nobel Laureate in Economics |
| 18) | Prof. Leland Hartwell |
|    | 2001 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine |
| 19) | Prof. Dudley Herschbach |
|    | 1986 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 20) | Prof. Avram Hershko |
|    | 2004 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 21) | Prof. Roald Hoffmann |
|    | 1981 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 22) | Prof. Takaaki Kajita |
|    | 2015 Nobel Laureate in Physics |
| 23) | Mdm Tawakkol Karman |
|    | 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 24) | Prof. Yuan T. Lee |
|    | 1986 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 25) | Mdm Mairead Maguire |
|    | 1976 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 26) | Mr. Mohamed Fadhel Mahfoudh |
|    | 2015 Nobel Peace Laureate |
| 27) | Prof. Rudolph A. Marcus |
|    | 1992 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry |
| 28) | Prof. Eric S. Maskin |
|    | 2007 Nobel Laureate in Economics |
| 29) | Prof. Michel Mayor |
|    | 2019 Nobel Laureate in Physics |
| 30) | Mdm Rigoberta Menchú Tum |
|    | 1992 Nobel Peace Laureate |
31) Prof. Edvard Ingjald Moser  
2014 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine

32) Prof. May-Britt Moser  
2014 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine

33) Mdm Nadia Murad  
2018 Nobel Peace Laureate

34) Mr. Adolfo Pérez Esquivel  
1980 Nobel Peace Laureate

35) HE José Ramos-Horta  
President of Timor Leste (2007-2012)  
1996 Nobel Peace Laureate

36) Sir Richard J. Roberts  
1993 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine

37) Mr. Guy Ryder  
Director-General, International Labour Organization  
1969 Nobel Peace Laureate

38) HE Juan Manuel Santos  
2016 Nobel Peace Laureate

39) Mr. Kailash Satyarthi  
2014 Nobel Peace Laureate

40) Prof. Gregg L. Semenza  
2019 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine

41) Prof Fraser Stoddart  
2016 Nobel Laureate in Chemistry

42) Prof. Jack W. Szostak  
2009 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine

43) Prof. Kip S. Thorne  
2017 Nobel Laureate in Physics

44) Mdm Jody Williams  
1997 Nobel Peace Laureate

45) Ms Malala Yousafzai  
2014 Nobel Peace Laureate

Leaders

1) HRH Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein
2) HRH Princess Rym Al Ali
3) HE Abdulaziz Altwaijri  
Former Director General of ISESCO
4) HE Rosalia Arteaga Serrano  
President of Ecuador (1997)
5) HE Sali Berisha  
President of Albania (1992-1997)  
Prime Minister (2005-2013)
6) HE Irina Bokova  
Director General, UNESCO (2009-2017)
7) HE Lakhhdar Brahimi  
United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria (2012-2014)  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria (1991-1993)
8) HE Gordon Brown  
Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (2007-2010)  
Chancellor of the Exchequer (1997-2007)

9) Mdm Sharan Burrow  
General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
10) HE Helen Clark  
Prime Minister of New Zealand (1999-2007)  
Administrator of UNDP (2009-2017)  
Member, Nizami Ganjavi International Center
11) HE Mirko Cvetković  
Prime Minister of Serbia (2008-2012)
12) Mdm Nathalie de Gaulle  
President and Co-Founder NB-INOV
13) HE Herman De Croo  
President of the Chamber of Representatives (1999-2007), Belgium
14) Mdm Maria Efrosinina  
Honorary Ambassador of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Ukraine
15) HE Jan Fischer  
Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (2009-2010)
16) Former First Lady Lorena Castillo García
First Lady of Panama (2014-2019)
Global Spokesperson Against Zero Discrimination (UNAIDS)
Ambassador for Peace of UN Women for Peace

17) HE Ameenah Gurib-Fakim
President of Mauritius (2015-2018)

18) HE Tarja Halonen
President of Finland (2000-2012)
Board of Trustees & Member, Nizami Ganjavi International Center

19) Dr. Noeleen Heyzer
Member of the High Level Panel of the UN Secretary General on Mediation

20) HE Dalia Itzik
Interim President of Israel (2007)
Speaker of Knesset (2006-2009)

21) HE Mladen Ivanić
President of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014-2018)

22) Mr. Mats Karlsson
Vice President of the World Bank (1999-2002)

23) Mdm Kerry Kennedy
President, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

24) HE Jadranka Kosor
Prime Minister of Croatia (2009-2011)

25) HE Zlatko Lagumdžija
Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2001-2002)
Deputy Prime Minister (1993-1996)

26) HE Tzipi Livni
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Israel (2006-2009)

27) HE Péter Medgyessy
Prime Minister of Hungary (2002-2004)

28) Dr. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
Executive Director, UN Women

29) HE Amre Moussa
Secretary General, Arab League (2001-2011)
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt (1991-2001)

30) HE Rosen Plevneliev
President of Bulgaria (2012-2017)

31) HE Mary Robinson
President of Ireland (1990-1997)
Founder, The Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice

32) HE Petre Roman
Prime Minister of Romania (1989-1991)

33) Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs
University Professor at Columbia University
Director of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network

34) Mr. Ismail Serageldin
Co-Chair, Nizami Ganjavi International Center
Vice President World Bank (1992-2000)

35) Mdm Gulnara Shahinian
UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (2008-2015)
Independent expert

36) HE Petar Stoyanov
President of Bulgaria (1997-2002)

37) HE Laimdota Straujuma
Prime Minister of Latvia (2014-2016)
Member, Nizami Ganjavi International Center

38) HE Boris Tadić
President of Serbia (2004-2012)

39) HE Eka Tkeshelashvili
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia (2010-2012)

40) HE Marianna V. Vardinoyannis
Goodwill Ambassador of UNESCO
Board of Trustees of MENTOR International Foundation

41) HE Filip Vujanović
President of Montenegro (2003-2018)

42) HE Viktor Yushchenko
President of Ukraine (2005-2010)

43) HE Kateryna Yushchenko
First Lady of Ukraine (2005-2010)