

## An interactive tracker for ceasefires in the time of COVID-19

COVID-19 poses a distinct health challenge in conflict-affected states. Conflict has been recognised as a direct threat to health and a factor that complicates responses to health crises.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting these challenges, the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called for a global ceasefire to stop violent conflict and assist addressing the pandemic on March 23, 2020.<sup>2</sup> In response, a number of organisations, including peacebuilders, researchers, and mediators (notably, the Mediation Support Unit of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs), came together to develop a ceasefire tracker that would also reflect health data and inform attempts to support ceasefires and pandemic responses in a coordinated way.

Data on ceasefires are collected using media reports and the expert knowledge of the participating organisations and their in-country partnerships and networks. Data collection was facilitated by the design of back-end coordination mechanisms by the Political Settlement Research Programme at the University of Edinburgh, UK, which enabled collaborative spreadsheets to be quickly uploaded and integrated with open-access COVID-19 health data. The resultant tracker, named Ceasefires in a Time of COVID-19, provides data on ceasefires that have been called during the pandemic and is filterable with regard to whether the ceasefires were temporary or indefinite and whether they were unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral. It provides information about the location and geography of the ceasefire; the ceasefire's content

(eg, what acts will be included and when it will start), with a link to a statement if one publicly exists; some indication of the conflict context; and links to previous ceasefires and peace agreements available on the PA-X Peace Agreement Database. Importantly, the tracker enables ceasefires to be viewed alongside COVID-19 infection and death data pulled in real-time from the application programming interface of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Systems Science and Engineering COVID-19 Dashboard.<sup>3</sup> The ceasefire tracker is available free-of-charge in three different views: a filterable timeline of ceasefires, a searchable database, and a map view in which the COVID-19 death and infection rates can be toggled on and off.

Several aspects of the tracker shed light on the relationship between the pandemic and conflict resolution efforts (appendix). Notably, the UN Secretary General's global call was not a game changer in terms of conflict globally: despite initial ceasefire responses, the number of ceasefire declarations has decreased over time and fewer ceasefires are referencing COVID-19. Non-state armed actors have disproportionately responded, often with unilateral ceasefires that have not been reciprocated, sometimes for strategic reasons such as raising their profile internationally. However, in some areas where infection rates are high (eg, northern Syria), humanitarian ceasefires have been called.<sup>4</sup>

The ceasefire tracker forms part of a growing number of trackers that track not just health data relating to the pandemic, but also social science data focused on the political fall out of the virus, such as conflict patterns or civic freedom—which themselves will have

public health consequences. It forms part of the University of Edinburgh's growing PeaceTech approach to harnessing data and technology innovation to support peacebuilding initiatives and illustrate how data from different expert domains and of different types can be integrated and visualised.<sup>5</sup>

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- 1 The Lancet. Violent conflict and health. *Lancet* 2010. <https://www.thelancet.com/series/violent-conflict-and-health> (accessed Nov 7, 2020).
- 2 United Nations. Global ceasefire. <https://www.un.org/en/globalceasefire> (accessed Nov 7, 2020).
- 3 Dong E, Du H, Gardner L. An interactive web-based dashboard to track COVID-19 in real time. *Lancet Infect Dis* 2020; **20**: 533–34.
- 4 Thompson TJ. Searching for COVID-19 ceasefires: conflict zone impacts, needs, and opportunities. Sept 15, 2020. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/09/searching-covid-19-ceasefires-conflict-zone-impacts-needs-and-opportunities> (accessed Nov 7, 2020).
- 5 Political Settlements Research Programme. Peacebuilding through technology: crafting digital platforms to facilitate peace. <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/2019/07/13/peace-through-technology> (accessed Nov 30, 2020).



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For the **PA-X Peace Agreement Database** see <https://www.peaceagreements.org>

See Online for appendix

For an **online library of COVID-19 ceasefire trackers** see <https://dbhatedin.github.io/CuratedTrackersLibrary>

For the **Ceasefires in a Time of COVID-19 tracker** see <https://pax.peaceagreements.org/static/covid19ceasefires>