Security Council head denounces paralysis in face of pandemic

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By AFP

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The UN Security Council's failure to act in the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic is a "shame" its acting president said Friday, lamenting "stumbling blocks" preventing the body from fulfilling its responsibilities.

Except for a virtual meeting on April 9, the Security Council has remained silent on the biggest global crisis since World War II, struggling to find a united response since the once-in-a-century pandemic began killing tens of thousands of people and shutting down economies across the world.

Estonian ambassador Sven Jurgenson, who holds the revolving presidency for the month of May, did not point fingers at any countries in particular.

But when asked about the status of a stalled draft resolution which would facilitate the fight against the virus with greater international cooperation and ceasefires in conflicts around the world, he made his frustration clear.

"My hope would be that it would have been voted for three weeks ago," he said.

"It's really a shame that we have not been able to fulfill our responsibility," Jurgenson said.

He added that he hoped the resolution, drafted by France and Tunisia and which has been under discussion for weeks, would be passed "now," suggesting a vote could come next week.

"But there are stumbling blocks, the situation is blocked at the moment," he warned, adding that "talks are continuing and they are continuing on high level."

He would not identify those responsible for the stalemate.

Diplomatic sources have said the draft is being blocked by the United States and China, both permanent members of the Council, because of a reference to the World Health Organization in the text.

China insists on the mention but the United States is refusing, sources told AFP earlier this week.

The draft resolution aims to strengthen international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic, and to support a call by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres for a cessation of hostilities in some 20 conflict zones, including places such as Afghanistan and Yemen.

At a press conference on Thursday, the UN chief lamented the lack of global leadership in the face of the pandemic, including at the United Nations.

"We know that the relation between the major powers in the world today is very dysfunctional, and that makes it difficult for the Security Council" to act, he said.