

OPEN LETTER TO EU LEADERS, EU & UK HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT FROM CIVIL SOCIETY JULY 2021

We, the [undersigned](#) organisations, are dismayed and exasperated by your refusal to countenance sharing vaccine knowledge and capacity with potential vaccine-producing countries around the world, especially in Africa. Despite [overwhelming](#) and [growing calls to action](#), you continue not to move on this issue and in that way you are putting all our lives at risk.

The people of the world should be able to expect their leaders to apply justice, equity and solidarity in the quest to vanquish the pandemic and protect all people. For that to be the case, everyone must have access to the COVID-19 vaccine, and all WHO-approved vaccines must be accepted as valid. As Antonio Gutierrez, Secretary-General of the United Nations said, 'No one is safe until we are all safe'. While Europe's remarkable vaccine roll-out - apparently at the rate of approximately [30 EU citizens per second](#) - is to be praised, this must not be a competition. This is not a glory-seeking exercise. This is about everyone's right to life, no matter where they live or where they were born. And you, leaders of the EU & UK, do not have the right to deny that to anyone.

While some countries begin to talk about recovery, are starting to resume normal life and are able once again to enjoy social, cultural and sports activities, many others are still struggling with new waves of the pandemic. While that remains the case, we are all at risk of virus mutations. We have already learnt that the virus knows no borders. Why, therefore, would you allow it to mutate freely in some parts of the world and risk those new variants resurfacing in your own countries?

It is abundantly clear that if we are to prevent infection, mutation and re-infection, everyone must be protected from the COVID-19 virus. Only this will ensure a global path to recovery.

In a globalised world, a 'me-first' approach is as short-sighted and misguided as it is selfish and dangerous.

For all people to have equal access to the vaccine and be treated without discrimination, we are calling for three key actions:

1. OVERCOME VACCINE HEGEMONY

We, the undersigned organisations, take exception to the continued refusal by European leaders, especially Germany and the UK, to allow the temporary relaxation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) as requested by [India and South Africa](#). Your refusal is preventing other countries from producing much-needed vaccines for billions of people. We have clearly seen that it is impossible to produce enough vaccines for the whole world when relying on just a few companies and production sites.

It is shameful to hear EU leaders proudly declare that "[Europe is nowadays the pharmacy of the world](#)" when cases of COVID-19 continue to climb in Africa, the COVAX mechanism is failing to deliver the required doses of vaccines and you refuse to allow South Africa and India, among others, to play a critical role in vaccine production. No one is asking or expecting Europe to be the pharmacy of the world. Africa does not want that. We call on you urgently to end your neocolonial control over other parts of the world.

Current Intellectual Property (IP) protection rules, as contained in the TRIPS Agreement, are a barrier to knowledge-sharing, technological transfer and raw material production. They are therefore a barrier to scaling up vaccine production and to ending the global pandemic. The best way to overcome this is to [end your monopolistic hegemony](#) on vaccines and to protect the right to life for all people, [by agreeing to a TRIPS Waiver in the WTO](#).

Private sector interests cannot be allowed to determine who lives and who dies. The profit of major pharmaceutical companies cannot take precedence over equity and justice! Enough is enough! "COVID-19

vaccines must be considered a global public good”, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated recently.

We, the undersigned organisations, therefore call on you, EU & UK leaders, to agree urgently to a WTO TRIPS Waiver. We also call on you to withdraw the EU’s current, counter communication, which is simply a distraction. Stop delaying the process and risking all our lives!

2. SUPPORT MANUFACTURING CAPACITY IN OTHER COUNTRIES

We know that agreeing to a WTO TRIPS waiver will not suffice. Countries will need support to manufacture and produce at scale the vaccines. It is estimated that to date only 2% of Africans have received a vaccine. However, a number of countries in Africa are interested in supporting vaccine production, in addition to South Africa, such as Senegal, Rwanda and Egypt. The EU must therefore also share knowledge, support technology transfer and strengthen capacity so that such countries can gear up vaccine production as rapidly as possible.

In light of the proclaimed “partnership” that Europe wishes to develop with Africa, it should bear in mind that actions speak louder than words. Europe is not living up to the very first real test of partnership.

Just as the virus knows no boundaries, so the virus will continue to mutate, creating variants, against which current vaccines may no longer work. Do you, EU & UK leaders, really want to have to rely on sealing borders, creating a Fortress Europe, in a vain attempt to keep the virus out, possibly for years to come? Your investment in the African continent now would serve to increase resilience in the longer term and to counter any future health pandemics more effectively.

We, the undersigned organisations, therefore call on you, EU & UK Leaders, to require pharmaceutical companies to share knowledge and technology so as to allow non-EU countries to produce vaccines and increase global production levels so that all countries can protect their people.

3. SUPPORT VACCINE DELIVERY IN-COUNTRY

While ‘vaccine-sharing’ is a very limited and short-term option, it will inevitably fail if commensurate efforts are not made to support vaccine delivery in-country. A number of countries, such as Malawi, DRC and South Sudan, have not been able to benefit from those few doses of vaccine that were delivered through the COVAX mechanism, owing to under-resourced and fragile domestic health systems. Once production ramps up in other parts of the world, notably in Africa, ensuring that the vaccine is delivered to individuals as quickly and efficiently as possible will require support.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated the importance of robust, well-resourced health systems. Even rich countries’ health systems have struggled to deal with the high rates of infection and to address the pandemic. Previous experience from viral outbreaks such as Ebola have provided valuable lessons for Africa, but this has largely served to limit infection. Those lessons have, however, also shown the critical importance of investing in frontline health-workers and community-based care. Investment in universal access to quality health systems is thus paramount and, as part of that effort, investment in health-workers and care-workers is key.

We, the undersigned organisations, therefore call on you, EU and UK Leaders, to support all countries to make critical investments in their health systems and to ensure fair and efficient delivery of vaccines to all.

As Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO, said, “[t]he world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure, and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world’s poorest countries.” Don’t let that happen on our watch!

[Sign our letter](#) to join people around the world in demanding EU leaders, Heads of State and Government to ensure #Vaccines4All. You can sign the letter as an individual or as an organisation by [completing this form](#).

This letter is also available in [French](#), [Portuguese](#) and [Spanish](#).

[Signatory organisations](#)