

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

April 15, 2021

Dear President Biden,

We the undersigned former Heads of State and Government and Nobel Laureates are gravely concerned by the very slow progress in scaling up global COVID-19 vaccine access and inoculation in low- and middle-income countries.

The world saw unprecedented development of safe and effective vaccines, in major part thanks to U.S. public investment. We all welcome that vaccination rollout in the U.S. and many wealthier countries is bringing hope to their citizens.

Yet for the majority of the world that same hope is yet to be seen. New waves of suffering are now rising across the globe. Our global economy cannot rebuild if it remains vulnerable to this virus.

But we are encouraged by news that your Administration is considering a temporary waiver of World Trade Organization (WTO) intellectual property rules during the COVID-19 pandemic, as proposed by South Africa and India, and supported by more than 100 WTO member states and numerous health experts worldwide.

A WTO waiver is a vital and necessary step to bringing an end to this pandemic. It must be combined with ensuring vaccine know-how and technology is shared openly. This can be achieved through the World Health Organization COVID-19 Technology Access Pool, as your Chief Medical Advisor, Dr. Anthony Fauci, has called for. This will save lives and advance us towards global herd immunity.

These actions would expand global manufacturing capacity, unhindered by industry monopolies that are driving the dire supply shortages blocking vaccine access. 9 in 10 people in most poor countries may well go without a vaccine this year. At this pace, many nations will be left waiting until at least 2024 to achieve mass COVID-19 immunization, despite what the limited, while welcome, COVAX initiative is able to offer.

These moves should be accompanied by coordinated global investment in research, development, and manufacturing capacity to tackle this pandemic and prepare us for future ones, as part of a more robust international health architecture. If this last year has taught us anything, it is that threats to public health are global, and that strategic government investment, action, global cooperation, and solidarity are vital. The market cannot adequately meet these challenges, and neither can narrow nationalism.

The full protection of intellectual property and monopolies will only negatively impact efforts to vaccinate the world and be self-defeating for the U.S. Given artificial global supply shortages, the U.S. economy already risks losing \$1.3 trillion in GDP this year. Were the virus left to roam the world, and even if vaccinated, people in the U.S. would continue to be exposed to new viral variants.

Mr. President, our world learned painful lessons from unequal access to lifesaving treatments for diseases such as HIV. By supporting a TRIPS waiver, the U.S. will provide an example of responsible leadership at a time when it is needed most on global health - as it has done so before on HIV, saving millions of lives. Your support in rallying allies and all countries to follow your lead will also be essential.

With your leadership, we can ensure COVID-19 vaccine technology is shared with the world. Supporting the emergency waiver of COVID-19 related intellectual property rules will give people around the globe a chance to wake up to a world free from the virus. We need a people's vaccine.

Many of us know, first-hand, the reality of political office and the pressures, challenges and constraints of leadership. However, we believe this would be an unparalleled opportunity for the U.S. to exercise solidarity, cooperation and renewed leadership, one we hope will inspire many more to do the same.

Please take the urgent action that only you can, and let this moment be remembered in history as the time we chose to put the collective right to safety for all ahead of the commercial monopolies of the few.

Let us now ensure an end to this pandemic for us all. As advocates for global and equitable vaccine access, we remain ready to support and add our voices to your efforts on this front.

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