

Tuesday, 14 September 2021

Dear Annalena Baerbock, Armin Laschet, and Olaf Scholz,

We, the undersigned former Heads of State and Government and Nobel Laureates, write to you in the conviction that Germany has a significant role to play in global efforts to bring the COVID-19 pandemic to an end. The impact of that would be of huge significance to people in Germany and around the world.

As candidates to be the next German Chancellor, responsibility for your country's leadership on this issue will fall on one of you.

German publicly-funded science developed the world-class mRNA BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine which was a huge achievement. Yet vaccines are zero per cent effective for those who cannot access them.

The fact that a few vaccine producers hold monopoly control over how much vaccine is made and where it is made has resulted in a serious shortage of doses. As a result, billions of people remain unvaccinated in countries without access.

In low-income countries, less than two per cent of adults are fully vaccinated. The global supply falls far short of the levels needed to provide global vaccination coverage. The artificial restriction on manufacturing and supply is leading to thousands of *unnecessary* deaths from COVID-19 each day, and countless thousands of cases - a proportion of which will suffer long term, adverse health impacts.

In light of this we are deeply concerned with Germany's continued opposition to a temporary waiver of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) intellectual property rules which thwart more rapid production of COVID-19 vaccines and access to technologies.

There are qualified manufacturers around the world who, with a temporary waiver of intellectual property rights and the necessary knowledge and technology transfer, could produce the billions of additional doses of safe and effective vaccines needed to fight the pandemic.

However, the position taken by Germany and some other countries at the WTO is undermining the will of the more than 100 countries which do support negotiations on a TRIPS waiver. South Africa and India have led the push for those negotiations, and they have been joined by others from across regions, including France and the United States.

We write to express our hope that, after its general election, Germany will change its position and will support negotiations on the proposed TRIPS waiver.

We do not advocate a suspension of intellectual property rules lightly, but we believe that it is essential in the fight against the pandemic. Moreover, a waiver would still allow for vaccine originators to be fairly compensated whilst vaccines truly become a public good.

While donating excess vaccines to developing countries is crucial, it is not in itself a sustainable solution – the vaccine problem is one of both distribution and supply. Covax aims to provide vaccines to cover nearly thirty per cent of populations in countries that it serves – and has been unable to obtain sufficient supply to meet even that modest goal. Its challenge is even more daunting as Germany and other high-income countries move to offer their citizens booster shots, while billions of people remain unvaccinated.

That is why developing countries being able to manufacture their own vaccines, and dramatically increase their supply, is vital. We need, more than ever, a people's vaccine.

If elected and chosen to lead the next German Government, we urge you to support a wide and comprehensive waiver of intellectual property rules on all COVID-19-related technologies at the WTO.

We also urge you to ensure that German pharmaceutical companies openly and rapidly share life-saving mRNA vaccine technology with qualified producers around the world, including by working with the World Health Organization COVID-19 Technology Access Pool and the mRNA hub in South Africa.

We urge you to make these the policies of any future coalition government.

Germany is in a unique and historic position today. Having helped create the most successful vaccine technology against COVID-19, by overcoming pharmaceutical monopolies and insisting that the technology be shared, it has the ability to help end this pandemic.

The experience that many of us share allows us to empathize with the realities of political office and the pressures you face. But let us be clear that this is an unparalleled moment: Germany can and must lead the charge to vaccinate the world.

Signed,