

**The World Federation
of Public Health Associations**
Institute of Global Health
University of Geneva
Campus Biotech - G6
Chemin des Mines 9
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

**His Excellency
Ambassador David Walker
Chair of the General Council
World Trade Organization
Geneva, Switzerland**

**Cc: Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN
& Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO**

Re: The global civil society claims for equitable access to vaccines against Covid-19

Dear Honourable Ambassador,

The World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA), on behalf of the Sustainable Health Equity Movement (SHEM)¹, respectfully expresses to the General Council of the World Trade Organization its deep concern about inequitable access to the COVID-19 vaccines that we are seeing around the world.

In order to effectively control the pandemic, it will be necessary to ensure an international vaccination strategy through which a significant portion of every country's population receives the vaccine. Incoherent with this basic epidemiological principle, the current vaccine distribution process will preclude reaching herd immunity or, at best, will lead countries to reach herd immunity at very different rates, based largely on wealth, in sharp contradiction with the demands of equity. In addition, this distribution process will prevent the global economy's fast recovery, causing greater human suffering and premature mortality.

According to GAVI, 92 low- and middle-income countries will be able to vaccinate against COVID-19 only one in five people in 2021. On the other hand, high-income countries, which account for just 14% of the world's population, have already purchased 48% of the 8.6 billion doses of the most promising vaccines—that is, more than enough doses to vaccinate their entire populations in 2021.

Given these facts, the global civil society represented by SHEM respectfully asks the WTO to take concrete actions to materialize what was proposed in the World Health Assembly (WHA)

¹ SHEM is composed of more than 200 global, regional and national public health and healthcare professional organizations, as well as academies of science, technology and medicine, in addition to poverty relief and grassroots organizations from around the world. These institutions represent approximately 20 million public health professionals, doctors and nurses in the frontlines of this pandemic, scientists from all knowledge areas, as well as representatives of grassroots movements and advocacy groups.

Resolution *WHA73.1*, titled ‘*Covid-19 response*’² related to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution *A/RES/75/130*, titled ‘*Global Health and Foreign Policy*’³. Both resolutions proposed and signed by all UN and WHO Member States, decided for equitable access to vaccines and other medicines and supplies to face COVID-19.

Among the measures we suggest, are:

1. All governments should support the proposal presented by South Africa and India to the TRIPS Council of the World Trade Organization, calling for a waiver of intellectual property rights applicable to vaccines, tests, and treatments related to COVID-19 until all countries are protected.
2. All governments must ensure that pharmaceutical companies working on COVID-19 vaccines openly share their technology and intellectual property through the WHO’s COVID-19 Technology Access Pool⁴ to increase the availability of safe and effective vaccines.
3. All governments should support WHO in ensuring equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines around the world, including fully funding COVAX. In response to the WHO Director-General’s call, manufacturers and countries should supply vaccines through COVAX, even donating a portion of their current supplies, and stop making bilateral deals.
4. All governments should financially support the WHO and invest in strengthening national health systems, including sustainable immunization programs, and urgently invest in cold chain processes viable for all countries, along with other investments, e.g., training health workers for vaccine distribution, required to prepare for the effective distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in all countries.
5. High-income countries should refrain from impairing access to vaccines elsewhere, which they have been doing by securing more vaccine doses than needed while blocking WTO efforts to waive COVID-19-related intellectual property rights.

We remain at your disposal to continue supporting efforts towards achieving equitable health in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

The World Federation of Public Health Associations
& the Sustainable Health Equity Movement

² World Health Assembly (2020). COVID-19 response. Retrieved from: https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA73/A73_R1-en.pdf

³ United Nations General Assembly (2020). Global health and foreign policy: strengthening health system resilience through affordable health care for all. Retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/130>

⁴ World Health Organization (2020). COVID-19 technology access pool. Retrieved from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/global-research-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/covid-19-technology-access-pool>