

AS DELIVERED

2021 ECOSOC SPECIAL MINISTERIAL MEETING

A VACCINE FOR ALL

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- Your Excellency Ambassador Akram, President of ECOSOC, Your Excellency Mr. Bozkir, President of the General Assembly, ECOSOC members, my brother Dr. Tedros, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honor for me to be with you today. Thank you for organizing this important event.
- The urgent and effective scaling up of vaccines and their equitable distribution on a global scale is a moral imperative, and a common goal shared by all. There should be no relaxation of our common commitment and determination to achieve this.
- The current situation is unacceptable – a situation which my brother Dr Tedros has already observed. One in four persons in high-income countries have been vaccinated, compared to one in over 500 in lower income countries. We have a situation where 83% of vaccines have gone to high-income or upper- and middle-income countries whilst 0.2% have gone to low-income countries who make up a tenth of the worlds population. It is morally unconscionable. And worse, it is self-defeating for public health and the global economic recovery.
- As the SG Mr. Guterres has said, vaccine equity is the biggest moral test before the global community. Addressing inequity is a task that confronts us at once with daunting and interlocking technical, logistical, policy and political challenges –with trade and regulatory issues including IP rights. But we can and must overcome these, in a practical, empirically-informed, inclusive and integrated manner.
- The impulse to conserve supplies for one's own population is understandable, as infections rise, and new variants emerge. As a former Minister myself, I sympathize with the need to be responsive to such compelling domestic concerns. We thank WTO members; the EU, China and India, who have been exporting vaccines to others. We urge them to continue and we ask other nations who produce but have not exported

any doses to please share. But the fact remains that COVID-19 cannot be fought individually. Securing our personal safety is not enough. We must find a way to share and to articulate the moral and practical case for vaccine equity.

- As an immediate step, it is essential that we all support COVAX (a facility several of us were closely involved in developing) on its vital mission of assuring equitable and affordable access to poor countries all over the world. Allowing COVAX to access the supply it contracted is one of the immediate solutions to the vaccine inequity issue for poor countries.
- And as part of the solution, a newly reinvigorated WTO is playing its part, in coordination with the WHO and the wider multilateral community represented at today's event.
- The vaccine equity event hosted by the WTO two days ago brought together key stakeholders, from governments to vaccine manufacturers to civil society, to map out the obstacles to vaccine scale-up and to chart the way ahead to increased vaccine production in the short- and longer-term.
- The WTO's response to the pandemic is vital. The aim of our event was to offer the WTO's support on addressing supply chain issues impeding vaccine supply, and to encourage manufacturers to increase production and investment, particularly in developing and least developed countries. It was also to encourage constructive dialogue, exchange, and some movement on the issue of the TRIPS waiver now being discussed and negotiated at the WTO's TRIPS council.
- There were encouraging takeaways from the event:
 - It made clear that there is untapped potential, notably in the developing world, to ramp up vaccine production beyond the traditional manufacturing hubs.
 - Funding and other resources are available to bankroll vaccine investment and further rollout to those who are missing out
 - But there are trade obstacles and regulatory complexities affecting raw materials, other inputs and products, and these can and should be addressed in a transparent and cooperative way by WTO Members
 - There is also a need for transfer of technology and know-how.

On the IP/TRIPS dimension

- On export restrictions, trade facilitation and regulatory hurdles, I have called on WTO members to further take action. Movement is already in the right direction. WTO members have reduced export restrictions from 109 in nearly 90 countries to 51 in 62 countries. We can and should do more.
- We have seen remarkable, unprecedented innovation in response to the pandemic. But this is of no avail without universal, equitable access to vaccines and access to diagnostic therapeutics.
- Within the WTO, as I earlier mentioned, an active debate is underway about the extent to which intellectual property rights protections are holding back vaccine production. A large number of developing countries favour temporarily waiving core obligations under the TRIPS Agreement. We must understand where their concerns come from. They come from what is happening now on vaccine inequity and from the memory of waiting a decade for affordable HIV/AIDS drugs, as millions of people died, and more recently in 2009 from watching rich countries buy up all available supplies of H1N1 vaccines. At the same time there are members who, whilst concerned about saving lives, want to find a way to continue to incentivize innovation, research, and development.
- I am convinced that if members engage, they can find constructive and pragmatic ways to bridge their differences on the TRIPS Agreement and the waiver proposal, such that we can contribute solutions to the present pandemic whilst preparing for future ones.
- I hope that all this should lead to a framework agreement on trade and health preferably before the WTO's Twelfth Ministerial Conference in early December, that would provide developing countries automaticity in access to vaccines and other critical health goods, whilst preserving the incentives needed for innovation and investment in R&D.
- We need global solidarity and political will to tackle these problems and save lives. Let us hope the ongoing engagements between private, public

sector, civil society and international institutions will lead us to the needed solution. At the WTO we shall endeavor to work harder to be part of that solution.

- Allow me to conclude by thanking His Excellency Mr Munir Akram, President of ECOSOC and His Excellency Mr Volkan Bozkir President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting of the International Community to shed more light on the problem and find a way forward to provide 'A Vaccine for All'