



COVID-19 Vaccine Access

Response to Joint Letter from Human Rights Watch, Public Citizen, MSF Access Campaign, and Amnesty International – 6 Jan., 2021

To:

Arvind Ganesan, Director, Business and Human Rights, Human Rights Watch
Peter Maybarduk, Access to Medicines Director, Public Citizen
Sidney Wong, Interim Co-Director, MSF Access Campaign
Stephen Cockburn, Head of Economic and Social Justice, Amnesty International

Dear Mr. Ganesan, Mr. Maybarduk, Dr. Wong, Mr. Cockburn,

Thank you for your letter addressed to the leadership of the COVAX Facility and Boards of Gavi and CEPI dated 14 December 2020, where you shared recommendations based on international human rights standards and principles.

It is indeed critical to the success of this initiative, especially as we move imminently towards vaccine deployment, that our efforts are aligned with human rights standards and principles, that the mechanisms we have in place monitor and respond to deviations in a meaningful and appropriate manner where they occur, and that we continue to strengthen our accountability and transparency within the governance frameworks established by the Boards of our organisations. We welcome the recognition of some of the recent transparency measures to this end in your letter.

Since the beginning of COVAX, we have taken concrete steps to operationalise the design of COVAX, priming it to be a practical vehicle for enabling our shared vision – affordable and timely access to safe and efficacious COVID-19 vaccines in all countries, especially low- and middle-income countries and economies. The input and feedback around governance, process, and technical elements that we have received from all the stakeholders involved in this unprecedented collaborative effort – including, in particular, from civil society – have been key enablers of major milestones thus far, including the fact that 190 countries and economies are now eligible or committed to participating in the COVAX Facility. A vital element of this has been the representation and participation of civil society colleagues in the COVAX Coordination Meeting, relevant technical working groups, and regular broader consultations.

Access to life-saving immunisation and essential primary health care is intimately tied to the realization of the right to health. Furthermore, equity is at the heart of all our organisations' core missions. Working together as an Alliance to protect the world's most vulnerable, Gavi and WHO know that unvaccinated children, for the most part, live in socially disadvantaged communities, where their fundamental rights are often not upheld fully. Equity and non-discrimination are guiding principles of our work as an Alliance on enhancing immunization because reaching marginalised communities paves the way for the same life-chances for every child. This is the realisation of their fundamental rights. Since its inception in 2017, CEPI's mission has been to accelerate the development of vaccines against emerging infectious diseases, and enable equitable access to these vaccines. CEPI's commitment to this mission underpins every aspect of CEPI's work – from vaccine development and manufacture to allocation and deployment. With COVID-19 taking a significantly higher toll on disadvantaged communities everywhere and directly undermining years of progress on societal well-being, leaving no one behind with immunisation is more

crucial than ever. COVAX builds on this ethos and the lessons learnt about equity as a driver of more just and healthy societies.

We believe that immunisation against COVID-19 is a global public good. To achieve this, we will need strong collaboration among country governments, UN agencies, the private sector, civil society, intergovernmental organisations, and all relevant stakeholders. COVAX offers great potential to improve international cooperation working together towards a common mission to protect everyone's right to a healthy future. Our success will not just determine how quickly we end this current crisis but will also help us prepare for the next pandemic. And in this, we share your view to build the groundwork for longer-term impact. We also share the ambition of building capacity for manufacturing vaccines in low- and middle-income countries, as already demonstrated by two technology transfer deals involving Serum Institute of India (SII). Agreements such as these recognise that know-how and capital-intensive start-up costs alongside intellectual property are effective in shaping markets, as Gavi's work has demonstrated over the past 20 years.

In line with SDG 9, COVAX encourages technology transfer to economies which have the capacity to produce vaccines, facilitating introductions and pairing with industry where this is helpful, and where resources permit, providing financial support to enable such processes. In the current compressed timeframe and in view of our goal to deliver 2 billion doses by the end of 2021, we have prioritized ensuring availability of volume, price and speed of delivery of vaccines, understanding that intellectual property rights are not a short term barrier to access. WHO will be able to provide responses on actions taken to minimize the mid and long term implications of potential intellectual property barriers to access to these products.

We take note of the important questions you have raised in the Annex I & II of your letter, including a set of policy recommendations. Our teams across the three organisations are working on developing responses to the detailed questions and policy recommendations and will revert shortly. Given the urgency to operationalise COVAX and facilitate deployment of doses to countries, we undertake to respond as soon after mid-January as possible. Prior to that we would be pleased to set up a conference call to discuss the issues. In the meantime, your advocacy and support for equitable access will be critical given the barriers that currently exist—as you describe in your letter.

In tackling these shared challenges, we remain keen to stay engaged with civil society, public health and human rights communities and to ensure your concerns are not only heard but wherever possible taken on board. We look forward to our continued and constructive dialogue and collaboration.

Sincerely,

Seth Berkley
CEO, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance

Soumya Swaminathan
Chief Scientist, World Health Organization

Richard Hatchett
CEO, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness
Innovations (CEPI)