

Love of Neighbour – Sharing vaccines and vaccine technology with developing countries

February 2022

“If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back the same amount.”

Luke 6:33-34

“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:36-37

The World Bank has stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted those in poverty and the vulnerable. Over five million people globally have died so far due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, around the world the virus and government responses have caused reversals in development and is delaying efforts to end extreme poverty and reduce inequality. Globally, extreme poverty rose in 2020 for the first time in over 20 years. It is currently estimated that around 100 million more people live on less than \$2.60 a day.

Vaccines and vaccine technology is being hoarded for selfish or monetary gain, resulting in a lack of sharing of vaccines globally. Around 7% of people in low-income countries have received a single dose of vaccine compared to over 75% in high-income countries. For example, Papua New Guinea has only 1.2% of its population having had two vaccine doses. Indonesia has 28% of its population having had two doses.

The Australian Government has responded reasonably to the needs of developing countries. It has pledged to donate 60 million vaccine doses to countries needing assistance. By early January 2022, it had delivered 17.5 million of those doses, intending to provide a further 12.5 million doses in the first half of 2022. In the first week of January 2022, it sent 4.5 million doses of Pfizer vaccine to south-east Asian nations, including 2.35 million doses to Cambodia. The Australian Government has also contributed:

- \$130 million to COVAX to supply vaccines in eligible developing countries;
- \$523 million for regional vaccines in the Pacific and south-east Asia; and
- \$100 million as part of a Quad initiative with the US, Japan and India to deliver a billion doses to south-east Asia by the end of 2022.

However, the need is great, and as a wealthy country, we can do much more to help our neighbours.

Further, the owners and managers of multinational pharmaceutical corporations have been resisting calls for them to share vaccine technology to assist people in developing countries. They wish to continue to make massive profits from the pandemic, regardless of the cost of lives and suffering. For example, Pfizer announced it expected to have revenue of \$50 billion from vaccine sales in 2021. Pfizer has lobbied against sharing vaccine technology with developing countries.

On 13 December 2021, the World Council of Churches joined leaders from five world faith traditions to call on World Trade Organisation (WTO) member governments to waive the Agreement on Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to allow developing countries access to vaccine technology. The Uniting Church in Australia is a member of the World Council of Churches.

The joint letter by religious organisations stated:

Approving the TRIPS waiver would remove a critical barrier to enabling widespread manufacturing of vaccines on a scale needed to quell the pandemic, lower costs and ensure equal access. We join South Africa, India, and more than 100 countries to call for its immediate approval. Our lives are intertwined. Making COVID-19 vaccines accessible to all should be

regarded as part of a race to save all of humanity. This is the humane and moral step to take without further delay.

The Omicron variant demonstrates again that we cannot defeat COVID-19 until people on every continent worldwide are vaccinated, and the virus can no longer readily adapt, mutate, and spread. Therefore, we must fulfil the goal of vaccinating 70 per cent of the total global population by the end of next year. To do so, we urge members of the World Trade Organization to prioritise human lives over profits and take every step necessary to approve the TRIPS waiver to facilitate the mass production of vaccines globally. Additionally, we call for urgent distribution of the new COVID-19 medication and other diagnostics tools worldwide.

The TRIPS waiver is needed because the TRIPS Agreement entrenches 20-year monopoly patents on new vaccines before cheaper versions can be produced. The waiver would increase global supply by enabling vaccine production in countries like India, South Africa, and Brazil, which are among the world's largest generic drug producers.

Much of the funding for the development of COVID-19 vaccines came from government revenue.

- The German Government gave Pfizer \$572 million to help manufacture their vaccine;
- The UK Government gave AstraZeneca \$161 million to develop their vaccine. They were provided with a further \$1.7 billion by the US Government. Around 97% of the cost of the development of the vaccine was from government revenue; and
- The US Government gave Moderna over \$1.32 billion to develop their vaccine.

The high level of government revenue used to develop the vaccines adds further weight to the arguments for vaccine technology to be shared for the benefit of everyone.

What you can do

Write polite and respectful letters to:

Senator The Hon. Marise Payne

Minister for Foreign Affairs
PO Box 6100
Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Hon Dan Tehan MP

Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Minister

Salutation: Dear Minister

The Hon Scott Morrison MP

Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Points to make in your letter:

- Thank the Australian Government for the assistance it has provided to help developing countries in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Note that many epidemiologists point out that we cannot all be safe until everyone is safe, as, without global vaccine coverage, the risk of virus mutation increases.
- Ask that the Australian Government:
 - provide an additional \$250 million to the COVAX facility;
 - increase its commitment to donate vaccines to developing countries from 60 million to 80 million; and
 - Support the establishment of a COVID-19 pandemic technology transfer hub in the Asia-Pacific region.
 - Provide logistical and health promotion support to assist countries in the delivery and take-up of vaccines.
- Seek a commitment that the Australian Government will actively support a waiver to the WTO TRIPS Agreement on COVID-19 vaccines and related technologies for the duration of the pandemic.