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Joint Civil Society Statement

Civil Society Organisations Calling for Vaccine Access and Equity For ALL

Africa now needs a People's Vaccine – a COVID-19 vaccine swiftly accessible to everybody free of charge.

COVID-19 has killed over a hundred thousand people across Africa, decimated African economies, and pushed millions of people into poverty and hunger with no end in sight unless there is a shift to ensure immediate full access to vaccines. The virus has profoundly exploited existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting frontline healthcare and other essential workers most of whom are women, and people who were already living in poverty.

Ensuring every African can get a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, swiftly and free of charge, is the most effective way to save lives and livelihoods, keep our children in school, reduce unemployment rates and re-open our economies. Without it, gains made by African countries on issues of food security, democratic governance, gender justice and women's rights will be reversed completely.

Of the 304 million doses administered worldwide so far, fewer than 0.2% have been in Sub-Saharan Africa, home to 14% of the world's population. African countries are not only being pushed further behind the vaccines queue through pharmaceutical companies' monopolies but are also being over-charged for every dose they procure. It is morally wrong that a country like Uganda, for example, is paying more than 3 times the price for the AstraZeneca vaccine than the far wealthier European Union countries. At this price it would cost Uganda more than double their entire national health budget to vaccinate everyone. This unjustifiably higher price for African countries combined with the high costs for administering the vaccines forces African Governments to make an impossible choice between vaccination and servicing debt as the debt crisis is looming hence compromising States' efforts to realise core rights and obligations with respect to the right to health.

At a time when the world should be pulling together, rich and powerful nations are putting the profits of their big pharmaceutical corporations over the safety and security of significant populations across the developing world, including the African people. They are doing so by protecting the monopolies of big pharmaceutical companies held on COVID-19 vaccines, which are preventing the mass manufacturing – including in Africa – that is desperately required today. It is a great injustice.

That is why the action by the US, UK and European countries to block a resolution sponsored by South Africa and India and supported by over 100 developing countries – including all countries of the African Union – to temporarily suspend Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) is an affront on people's right to healthcare. Indeed, a handful of rich nations are also buying up the world supply of vaccines – procuring many times more than they need - Canada and the UK, for example, have procured enough vaccines to vaccinate their populations 4 times over. The move by the European Union to establish an export control system for COVID-19 vaccines - despite its leaders proclaiming that "no one is safe until everyone is safe"- demonstrates how vaccine nationalism will only hurt us all and slow down the road to recovery.

The resultant move by some African governments to enlist private sector actors as providers of the much-needed essential vaccines is greatly concerning. Handing over such an essential public good to those whose primary objective is profit could mean allowing access to the much-needed COVID-19 vaccines to only those with ability to pay, leaving millions of poor Africans vulnerable to the disease. If there is anything that this pandemic has taught us, it is the power of public services that are accessible to all.

As time ticks by, few doses of COVID-19 vaccines have started to trickle into the continent through the World Health Organization's (WHO) COVAX facility (about 2 million doses) and the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team of the African Union. While rich country leaders and pharmaceutical companies and their supporters are quick to celebrate COVAX for people in Africa, and indeed we welcome the few charitable doses COVAX provides, let us be clear that it is by no means an acceptable solution required for today's crisis.

While more African countries will see the arrival of doses in the coming days from the COVAX facility, the amounts available mean only three percent of people in those countries can hope to be vaccinated by mid-year, and only one fifth at best by the end of 2021. Moreover, little or no information is readily available on when vaccine access will occur and who will be prioritised in individual States, the capacity of States to roll out vaccines, and the financing models.

And yet it is not only in the interests of the African people for pharmaceutical companies' monopolies to be ended and for global manufacturing supply to be unlocked – but also in the interest of people across the world, including in rich countries. The longer we allow COVID-19 to spread around the world, the more we will give room for new variants to develop that could be resistant to existing vaccines. A People's Vaccine unites the world.

Until then, the message that rich nations and powerful pharmaceutical companies are sending to the African people is that our lives are less important than lives of people in rich nations. This is not the first time we have got this message: we lost our brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers as ten million lives were needlessly lost to HIV and AIDS, the last time we relied on the good will of pharmaceutical corporations in a crisis.

As civil society organisations across Africa, we join our voices to call for a People's Vaccine, which provides protection as a global public good, freely and fairly available to all, prioritizing those most in need.

We call on:

1. The US, UK, EU and G20 countries to:

- To demonstrate commitment to human rights by supporting South Africa and India's proposal at WTO to waive intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments until everyone is protected. This would allow scale up in production and ensure Africa's equitable and affordable access to the desperately needed vaccines. A NO vote at WTO today by any country is a vote in favour of prolonged pandemic.
- To insist pharmaceutical companies, which have benefited from publicly funded research and development to share the science of the vaccines and the technology to enable generic and timely mass production of enough and

safe COVID-19 vaccines through the WHO's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (CTAP).

- To insist that vaccines are sold at true cost prices: pricing must be transparent and based on the cost of research, development and manufacturing, as well as taking into account any public funding provided.
- To cancel debt and support issuance of Special Drawing Rights by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to allow African countries with additional fiscal space to procure and administer vaccines.
- To demand that funds provided by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) for COVID-19 response are free from any austerity requirements.

2. Pharmaceutical companies which are producing COVID-19 Vaccines

- To share vaccine technologies and know-how nationally and globally to overcome price and supply barriers, through the WHO led CTAP.
- To sell the vaccines at true cost prices taking into account any public funding provided.
- To publicly disclose disaggregated costs of research, development, production, financing and all other relevant data in an accessible form.
- To refrain from any action that unduly impacts on States' ability to ensure availability, accessibility, and affordability of COVID-19 vaccines. This should include any action that may discourage states to use TRIPS flexibilities or support the proposed WTO TRIPS waiver.

3. African Union

- To set-up mechanisms and work with WHO to independently determine — without fear or favour the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines being supplied on the continent.
- To unify the African voices with that of other developing countries and regional blocs to boldly call for an equitable and fair access to COVID-19 vaccines for all and an end to vaccine nationalism.

4. African Governments

- To prioritize vaccination of those people most at risk, including frontline healthcare and social-care workers, essential workers, older people, people with pre-existing conditions at higher risk particularly those living with HIV/AIDS, and local humanitarian workers. The prioritization process should be transparent and include participation of civil society and marginalized groups.
- To make publicly available government COVID-19 vaccines agreements and contracts, including procurement and distribution plans with number and pricing of doses procured per company, and the cost of procurement, financing mechanisms, and the disaggregated data of those who have been vaccinated.
- To ensure full participation of civil society in decision-making fora about the vaccines (and other COVID-19 technologies) and ensure transparency and accountability of all decisions.
- To invest in publicly funded healthcare services which are accessible to all.

Signed by:

1. African Alliance
2. Akina Mama Wa Afrika
3. Amnesty International
4. AwaaZ
5. Christian Aid
6. Coalition for Grassroots Human Rights Defenders-Kenya
7. Daughters of Mumbi Global Resource Center
8. Defenddefenders (*East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project*)
9. East Africa Tax and Governance Network (EATGN)
10. Inuka Kenya
11. Kenya Fight inequality Alliance
12. Kondele Social Justice Center
13. Mwafrika Mwenzangu
14. Oxfam International
15. Pan Africa Fight Inequality Alliance
16. Peoples Vaccine Kenya
17. Sauti ya Wanawake, Lamu County, Kenya
18. Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN)
19. Tax Justice Network Africa (TJNA)
20. The Africa Women's Development and Communications Network (FEMNET)
21. The African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD)
22. The Pan African Lawyers Union (PALU)
23. Tribeless Youth
24. Vaccine Advocacy Resource Group