



04 May, 2021

To,

Hon. Ms. Erna Solberg,
Prime Minister of Norway

Subject: Pakistan front-line health workers seek your support for the TRIPS waiver

Dear Hon. Ms. Erna Solberg,

,

We write on behalf of the front-line community health workers of Pakistan to urge your government to support the proposal of India and South Africa, among several other countries, for a [“Waiver From Certain Provisions Of The TRIPS Agreement For The Prevention, Containment And Treatment Of Covid-19”](#).

Our members, known as Lady Health Workers in Pakistan, have made extraordinary sacrifices throughout the pandemic – contributing to the pandemic response, supporting our communities, and delivering essential public health services. They are risking their lives to keep the community safe. Several of our members have contracted Covid-19 as a result of their work.

Like many other countries, Pakistan is facing challenges in accessing enough vaccines to inoculate its population against Covid-19. The government is trying to vaccinate front-line healthcare workers and citizens over the age of 40 free of charge. But so far, less than 1% of the population has been vaccinated. Despite that we are expected to continue our work, including urgent work to deliver other scheduled vaccines like the polio vaccine, bringing us in close contact with our communities, even though we are yet to be vaccinated. Community members regularly ask us about the vaccine and why we are asking them to accept other vaccinations but not giving them access to the Covid-19 vaccine. We face harassment, discrimination and even threats when we do our work.

We are concerned that vaccinations will be led by the private sector and be available to the rich first. Because of global vaccine scarcity and the high cost, our government has allowed private actors to make the vaccine available for a price. Pharmaceutical companies are dictating prices to our government, consuming scarce public finances at a time when they need more public funds for a healthy recovery.

There are just not enough vaccines being produced globally for mass vaccination to be viable, let alone affordable. We know the difference it makes to a vaccination program to be free of intellectual property protection. The polio vaccination campaigns we lead would not have been possible if the rights to it were held by one pharmaceutical company.

The fastest and fairest way to end this pandemic is to follow the example of the polio eradication programme and allow affordable, generic vaccines to reach every person on earth. [CEPI identified manufacturers in over 30 countries](#) with vaccine manufacturing capability, and manufacturers in neighbouring India and Bangladesh have stated that [they have the capacity to produce](#) vaccines if the intellectual property barriers are lifted.

Inadequate vaccination in low and middle income countries such as Pakistan is leaving the door open for further mutations to occur, and extend the pandemic for all of us and for your citizens too. According to epidemiologists, persistent low vaccine coverage in any countries make it more likely for vaccine-resistant mutations to appear, rendering the vaccination campaigns that are currently underway ineffective.

We implore you to support us, support our country and support the millions of women like us worldwide that are putting the health of our communities ahead of wealth or personal interest. Please support the Covid-related waiver proposal ahead of the WTO General Council meeting scheduled for 5 and 6 May 2021.

Sincerely,

(Halima Zulqarnain)
President
All Sindh Lady Health Workers and Employees Union

(Musarat Basharat)
General Secretary
Punjab Ladies Health Workers Union

Copy to:

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Iselin Nybø, Minister of Trade and Industry

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