

Caritas Internationalis calls for the intellectual property rights waiver necessary for developing countries to overcome challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

On the occasion of the Twelfth World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (June 12-15), Caritas Internationalis calls on WTO Members to waive intellectual property rights for all medical technologies to support information sharing and technology transfer to developing countries, to help them respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After 18 months of negotiations regarding the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), Caritas Internationalis would have wished that the reality of COVID-19 could open the door for finding and implementing effective, broad and comprehensive solutions to address the life-threatening challenges faced by the poorest and most vulnerable people of our world.

Waiving all intellectual property rights for the duration of the pandemic will enable countries in the Global South to produce vaccines and build stronger and resilient health systems capable of coping with potential future pandemics. This cannot be done unless a quick transfer of knowledge through training and accompaniment to produce vaccines is agreed upon.

“It is a basic right for every person to have access to healthcare in all circumstances, especially during pandemics. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to impact the lives of millions of people worldwide, it has become evident that the citizens of developing nations should have equitable access to life-saving vaccines,” says Caritas Internationalis Secretary General Aloysius John.

According to the latest figures from the UNDP, only 17.6% of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, whereas 72.2% of people in high-income countries have been vaccinated with at least one dose. Unfortunately, people living in poverty – who are most exposed to diseases and its impacts – have been left alone and do not have access to healthcare, vaccines and essential health technologies and resources to face COVID-19 and emerging variants.

Caritas Internationalis would like to inform WTO Members participating in this year’s Ministerial Conference that the TRIPS Agreement, whilst definitely a compromise, still does not constitute a comprehensive temporary waiver as: it imposes new barriers on countries attempting to remove intellectual property barriers and increase COVID-19 medicines production; does not cover all of the intellectual property barriers to COVID-19 technologies access; does not cover therapeutics and diagnostics; and, excludes entire countries.

“We call on all countries to urgently base their decisions on a human rights framework, making sure that the dignity of every individual is preserved and social justice prevails,” adds John.