

CI ORIENTATIONS ON COVID-19 VACCINES

Covid-19 has raised many challenges for humanity and has totally transformed our societies. Pope Francis said “humanity came together in solidarity to fight against the pandemic, and it is only together in solidarity that we can get out of this situation”.

At a time when vaccines are debated as vital means of protecting against the pandemic, Caritas Internationalis recalls the need for addressing the issue of vaccines not as a sheer commodity or economic issue. The recent emergence of new variants calls for immediate response to prevent the virus from spreading and mutating further, thus continuing to attack and steal more human lives.

Vaccines are to be considered as common property of humanity and must be made available for all with equity, justice and as a human right. The current situation must be addressed holistically, considering global healthcare, preventive care and accessibility at once. Prioritizing intellectual property rights over the human right to health and life for the sake of economic interests will be an unacceptable obstacle to achieving this goal, and will also be a source of discrimination. Preventive care must be considered as a human right and all people, wherever they are, must have access to vaccines.

This cannot be achieved without including the global South in the production of vaccines. There are laboratories and pharmaceutical production centers which possess the necessary scientific knowledge and must be given the possibility to produce these precious life-saving vaccines.

Caritas Internationalis, a Confederation of 162 Member Organizations based in 200 countries and territories in the world, requests the States Member of the World Trade Organization ahead of its General Council meeting of 1-2 March to:

- Agree on waiving patents on vaccines and on sublicensing to make production open to the many laboratories and manufacturing facilities existing in many countries, which are capable to produce Covid-19 vaccines but have been so far blocked due to patents and other intellectual property protection measures.
- Support developing countries in the global South, and the pharmaceutical companies therein, with technical know-how and technology transfer to enable the production of vaccines locally.
- Ensure the quick transfer of knowledge through training and accompaniment to produce vaccines effectively and expeditiously.

Powerful actors such as the EU are called to lead by example: the EU should promote equitable vaccination not only for Europe, but also for people living in low- and middle-income countries by ensuring that also such countries can directly make vaccines available at an affordable price during 2021. The EU should unblock intellectual property obstacles at multilateral level by accepting to waive TRIPS¹ Agreement rules on an emergency basis, with the aim of facilitating localized production and providing technical assistance to enhance local capacities. We address the same request to other powerful countries who are home to large patent-owner pharmaceuticals such as the United States.

Persevering in obeying to short-term economic interests - dictated by selfish greed – will prolong current injustice at unbearable human costs, marking a historic moral failure. Aligning high political choices to the needs of humanity will change the course of this pandemic, showing that indeed we are one human family.

¹ Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.