

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
Prime Minister
Private Bag 18888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160
jacinda.ardern@parliament.govt.nz

Nanaia Mahuta
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Private Bag 18888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160
nanaia.mahuta@parliament.govt.nz

Damien O'Connor
Minister of Trade
Private Bag 18888
Parliament Buildings
Wellington 6160
damien.oconnor@parliament.govt.nz

29 January 2021

Re: Supporting a People's Vaccine

Dear Prime Minister Ardern and Ministers Mahuta and O'Connor

The world has watched Aotearoa New Zealand's remarkable response to COVID-19. Our leaders struck a different path from many other countries, one informed by experts, and our team of five million pulled together to keep all New Zealanders safe. As the world continues watching, we can demonstrate our kindness and solidarity by supporting a People's Vaccine, so we can all get through this pandemic together.

We, the undersigned 42 organisations and noted experts, request that Aotearoa New Zealand support a People's Vaccine and back India and South Africa's proposal for a temporary relaxation of intellectual property rules from certain provisions of the WTO Agreement on Trade Related Aspect of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19.

The proposed waiver would last until widespread vaccination has occurred and the majority of the world is immune, and would be reviewed annually. If implemented, it will result in significantly expanded production of COVID-19 vaccines, lowering prices and widening availability, particularly for low-income developing countries. The market monopolies conferred under the WTO patent protection regime and the restrictive pricing structures set by the pharmaceutical industry are among the largest barriers for low income developing countries to access essential medicines.

As it currently stands, experts are projecting that it will take until 2024 for low-income developing countries to be able to fully vaccinate their populations against COVID-19. On 18 January World Health Organisation Director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus noted that while 39 million doses had been administered in rich countries, a mere 25 doses had been administered in low income countries. Existing flexibilities under the TRIPS agreement are inadequate, relying on a cumbersome compulsory licensing mechanism and leaving the door open to delays via dispute resolution. Companies exercising their rights to contest how the flexibilities are used endangers lives and livelihoods, slowing the global economic recovery and impacting both the developed and developing world.

Without further action we will fall far short of the Prime Minister's call for "equal global access to a COVID-19 vaccine". In July 2020, you, Prime Minister Ardern co-authored an op-ed in The Washington Post, with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa and several other world leaders, saying "where you live should not determine whether you live". Supporting South Africa and India's proposal at the WTO is about honouring that commitment. To date however, Aotearoa New Zealand has not taken a firm public position when this matter has been discussed at the WTO and said it needs more information. We consider this is not a matter on which Aotearoa New Zealand can, with integrity, sit on the fence.

We have seen throughout 2020 how the pandemic has acted as a handbrake on human development and economic growth, sending economies into the severest depression in more than half a century, and leading to a sharp global increase in unemployment, not to mention the pandemic's severe health impacts that have already claimed more than two million lives globally. Backing the relaxation of rules in the face of this emergency is also consistent with a rules-based international order: the waiver is being pursued through the WTO, via the right process, for a temporary period and with annual monitoring.

If 2021 is going to become the "year of the vaccine" then the international community must take serious action. The team of five million needs to join the team of seven billion. As the outgoing Chair of the WTO General Council, Aotearoa New Zealand's leadership to support this temporary relaxation of patent rules relating to COVID could prove crucial to safeguarding global public health.

Without this action 2021 may instead become referred to as the first year of *vaccine apartheid*, where poor countries have to wait their turn as their people die and economies collapse, and rich countries use their wealth to jump the queue. We call on you to uphold Aotearoa New Zealand's reputation as a good global citizen by championing a People's Vaccine.

In unity,

1. Action Station
2. Amnesty International Aotearoa New Zealand
3. Aotearoa Legal Workers Union (ALWU)
4. Aotearoa Tech Union (ATU)
5. Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS)
6. Auckland Action Against Poverty (AAAP)
7. Auckland Feminist Action
8. Auckland Peace Action
9. Auckland Philippine Solidarity (APS)
10. Auckland Unitarian Church
11. Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA)
12. Child Fund
13. Christian World Service
14. Dairy Workers Union (DWU)
15. Economic and Social Research Aotearoa (ESRA)
16. E Tū Union
17. FIRST Union
18. Generation Zero
19. Greenpeace Aotearoa
20. Health Sector Workers Network of Aotearoa New Zealand
21. Hospo Workers Union
22. Indian Workers' Association

23. It's Our Future
24. Just Speak
25. Professor Jane Kelsey, University of Auckland
26. Cardinal John Dew, Archbishop of Wellington
27. Médecins Sans Frontières New Zealand
28. Migrante Aotearoa
29. National Council of Women New Zealand
30. New Zealand Alternative
31. NZ Council of Trade Unions Te Kauae Kaimahi (NZCTU)
32. New Zealand Education Initiative (NZEI)
33. NZ Public Service Association (PSA)
34. Oxfam NZ
35. People Against Prisons Aotearoa (PAPA)
36. Dr. Siouxsie Wiles
37. Tearfund
38. Union Network of Migrants (UNEMIG)
39. UnionAID
40. Unite Union
41. Uyghur Solidarity Aotearoa NZ
42. World Vision