Re: Upcoming Global COVID-19 Vaccine Summit

February 21, 2022

Dear President Biden,

Nearly six months after your first global COVID-19 vaccine summit highlighted the importance of vaccinating at least 70% of the world’s population by this fall, the world still has no plan to produce and equitably distribute the supplies needed to accomplish that goal. As you prepare for what we understand will be a second such summit, we write to urge you to recognize the greater-than-ever need to dramatically increase the global production, affordability and equitable distribution of COVID vaccines, tests and treatments.

At the time of this writing, nearly half of humanity is still not fully vaccinated — including almost 95% of people in low-income nations. Meanwhile, the very definition of “fully vaccinated” is itself shifting in ways that require a much greater volume of vaccine doses than at the time of your first summit. Ongoing vaccine and treatment shortages in developing countries may be spawning new COVID variants that have created increased demand for boosters and potentially even new vaccine formulas.

Mr. President, we will never get out of this endless cycle of death and disability and its resulting social and economic disruption unless people worldwide have ready access to vaccines, treatments and test kits. World leaders have failed to take the actions required to fill this need and end the crisis.

In response to the Omicron variant, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention now recommends a third mRNA vaccine booster shot for most adults and older children. While less than 20% of people worldwide have received such a booster, many countries are already discussing the possibility of additional booster shots and variant-specific vaccine formulas — all before billions of individuals have received their first shot. In addition, a majority of those in the global south who were once considered fully vaccinated received vaccines that fail to provide the same level of immunity and protection against disease progression as that provided by mRNA vaccines against newer COVID variants. While any level of vaccination is much better than none, these realities point to the ongoing need for drastically increased mRNA vaccine production.

Researchers have estimated that there are over 100 underutilized facilities in all regions of the world capable of producing mRNA vaccines if only intellectual property barriers were waived, technical know-how shared and some additional resource support for vaccine component supplies provided. Moderna and Pfizer have thus far refused to voluntarily license mRNA technology to these facilities. And while the United States announced support for a temporary waiver at the World Trade Organization (WTO)
to override intellectual property monopolies on vaccine components and final formulations, to date the whole-of-government leadership needed to achieve a WTO waiver has been inexplicably absent, as has the use of existing executive authorities to require technology transfer.

Promising new COVID treatments, like nirmatrelvir/ritonavir and potentially fluvoxamine, which can be taken orally at home to combat disease progression, hospitalization, and death, must also be produced in much greater volumes, sold more cheaply, and distributed more equitably so that they are readily available to everyone who needs them everywhere in the world. And as shortages within our own country have shown in recent months, the world likewise needs far more test kits. Although we have a shortage of antigen rapid diagnostic tests domestically, testing rates in middle-income countries are only 10% of those in the high-income countries, while only a shocking 1% in low-income countries. COVID treatments will only work well if coupled with robust, community-based test-and-treat programs.

With this context in mind, as you set the agenda for the Q1 2022 global vaccine summit, we urge you to please supplement any new vaccine donation pledges with both time commitments and concrete actions that help enable low- and middle-income countries to produce and receive more vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics. Specifically, we ask that you please:

• Issue a joint temporary TRIPS waiver text with South Africa and India on COVID-19 related vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics and call publicly on the WTO to convene an emergency virtual session of the General Council to approve the waiver within thirty days. Only U.S. leadership in partnership with the waiver proposal’s initial sponsors can break the WTO deadlock caused by ongoing European opposition.

• Publicly share vaccine-making recipes that were developed with U.S. taxpayer support, and incentivize or compel pharmaceutical companies and other intellectual property holders to share vaccine, diagnostic and medicine-making patent rights, data rights, and technical know-how with qualified producers around the world. The U.S. has legal authority under the Defense Production Act, the Bayh-Dole Act, and 28 U.S.C. section 1498 to compel the needed technology transfer and to invest in scaling up manufacturing capacity.

• Announce financial and other support for the use and expansion of vaccine, diagnostic and treatment manufacturing capacity in Africa, Latin America and Asia, as well as for vaccination as test-and-treatment programming in low- and middle-income countries.

Despite an understandable fatigue with respect to the pandemic and a desire to return to normal, that cannot mean accepting a “new normal” of thousands of avoidable deaths each day, further risks of “long COVID” infections or the possibility of new COVID variants that could necessitate new rounds of school and business closures. Instead, it is time for the United States to drastically scale up its efforts to help lead the world to vaccinate, test, and treat itself and end this pandemic.

As you’ve stated many times before, Americans will never be fully safe from COVID so long as people are unable to access effective vaccines and treatments in other parts of the globe. The United States
and the world require your bold leadership on this matter. Please let us know how we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Trade Justice Education Fund
ActionAid USA
American Federation of Teachers
American Friends Service Committee
American Indian Mothers Inc
American Jewish World Service
Amnesty International USA
Association of Flight Attendants-CWA
Association of Western Pulp & Paper Workers
AVAC
Backbone Campaign
Body Politic
Border Agricultural Workers Project
Campaign for America’s Future
Catholic Medical Mission Board
Center for Common Ground
Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health (CPATH)
Citizens Trade Campaign
Coalition of Labor Union Women
Codepink
Community Food and Justice Coalition
Compañeras Campesinas
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces
Council on American-Islamic Relations
Disciples Center for Public Witness (Disciples of Christ)
Doctors for Global Health
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Fair World Project
Family Farm Defenders
Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions
Fight for the Future
Free Speech for People
Greenpeace USA
Health Alliance International
Health Global Access Project
Holy Cross International Justice Office
Indivisible
Jobs With Justice
Justice is Global
Latin America Working Group
Marked By COVID
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Migrant Clinicians Network
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate JPIC Office
Move To Amend
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National AIM IC/AIM Patrol
National Family Farm Coalition
National Religious Campaign Against Torture
Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New Rules for Global Finance Coalition
Other98
Our Revolution
Oxfam America
Partners In Health
Pax Christi USA
Peletah Ministries
People for the American Way
Physicians for a National Health Program
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Progressive Democrats of America
Progressive Doctors
Public Citizen
R2H Action [Right to Health]
ReThink Trade
RootsAction.org
Rural Advancement Fund of the National Sharecropper Fund
Rural Coalition
Rural Development Leadership Network
Social Security Works
The Campaign to End Covid Now
The Center for Science in the Public Interest
The Myalgic Encephalomyelitis Action Network (#MEAction)
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
Transport Workers Union of America
Treatment Action Group
UE - United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
United Church of Christ, Justice and Local Church Ministries
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
Win Without War
World Farmers Inc.