

EU's commitment urgently needed on vaccine scale up and TRIPS waiver

GERMANY VS THE WORLD?

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Uganda, the WHO & more than 100 countries want to make vaccine patents public. Angela Merkel and the German Government are blocking their proposal.



(EPSU-PSI Statement, 14 July 2021) On the eve of Chancellor Merkel's visit to the USA, over 10 million health workers in the United States, Europe and 150 countries, appeal to Angela Merkel to show leadership in Europe and join the United States in support of health workers and citizens who desperately need the WTO waiver of intellectual property (IP) protection measures for COVID-19 health technologies (TRIPS Waiver).

As representatives of workers who have been delivering vital public services throughout this health emergency, we are concerned that the EU is holding up progress in taming the pandemic. The rallies held across the United States on the occasion of Chancellor Merkel's visit are a sign of the wide-spread expectations that citizens have about the role that Germany and the EU should play in the crucial negotiations on the TRIPS waiver.

The announcement of United States' support for waiving IP on vaccines in early May opened the door for constructive engagement on the text being negotiated in the WTO. This was an important step and the right response to the lack of delivery of vaccines to most low- and middle-income countries. We are concerned that more than a year after the proposal by India and South Africa and two months after the Biden declaration, the EU is still expressing doubts about the relevance of the waiver and undermining text-based negotiations.

If Germany was to join the United States in acknowledging the need to waive IP protection during the pandemic, this would help shift remaining doubts from governments in the EU but also in UK, Japan, Canada and Australia. Lack of progress on the waiver is currently holding up the roll-out of vaccines in the global south, causing thousands of unnecessary deaths and placing us all at unnecessary risk as variants circulate and gain strength.

Recovery and transition back to normalcy will not happen in one part of the world, while the virus ravages other parts of the world. The delta variant is now a growing concern world-wide. We are interconnected and must make vaccines, testing, and treatments available everywhere if we are going to crush the virus anywhere.

More than a month after the G20 Summit on health committed to deliver millions of vaccine doses, the reality is that rich countries current efforts, such as COVAX or bilateral engagements, are not fast enough or sufficient to adequately address global needs. This is causing unnecessary suffering and deaths and reminds us of the millions of unnecessary deaths from HIV-AIDS during a period when pharmaceuticals' IP protection was not waived. We cannot afford to repeat such a tragedy.

Our members are the health care workers who have sacrificed much, too often with their lives. We wish to make clear that governments who prioritise the profits of large pharmaceutical companies over protecting lives are making a mockery of their sacrifice. We can see no valid reason for not taking decisive action now. The Chair of the TRIPS Council rightly identified the WTO General Council of end-July as the target for a decisive outcome of the current schedule of negotiations.

The world is watching. The EU will not be able to hide its obstructing game behind empty alternative proposals and other delaying tactics.

We call on Germany and the EU to work with the US administration and the 65 proponents of the text to secure a TRIPS waiver.

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