

Dear Leaders of the G7 nations

We are writing ahead of your crucial summit meeting in the United Kingdom this week to urge you to take decisive global action in the response to Covid-19. You are meeting against a distressing backdrop. While vaccination offers a light at the end of a very long tunnel, Covid-19 infections are running at a record high and deaths are rising but in many of the poorest and most disadvantaged countries of the world. The Director General of the WHO has recently warned that deaths in 2021 could surpass the levels reached last year.

Like political leaders around the world, all of you are striving to protect your citizens. Many countries are today struggling with high transmission rates overburdened intensive care units, and desperate shortages of oxygen. Human suffering continues to unfold on an international scale.

We believe this suffering is avoidable if prompt action is taken – the kind of action that President Biden has recently supported, by calling vaccine patents to be waived.

The recognition of our common humanity makes it imperative that we rise to the challenges posed by a virus that recognises no border. The phrase ‘none of us are safe until all of us are safe’ is not a political slogan but a scientific fact and should be clear from the rapid spread of more transmissible variants.

Universal vaccination, freed from competitive haggling over costs and inflexible enforcement of patents, and made promptly available to the poorest countries, will protect us all; and the sooner we are all protected the sooner societies, economies, and hopes can stabilise and recover.

It is completely understandable that governments in every country want to vaccinate their own citizens. But in fighting a global pandemic, we must realise that we are a single human community – and that everyone's security depends on global success in vaccination.

It is in that context that we write to you. To date, around 1 billion doses of anti-Covid-19 vaccines have been administered.

Just over a year ago, the WHO and partners came together to forge the ACT-A partnership. The aim was to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics. The Covax facility shares the risks of vaccine development and – critically – ensures that the fruits of that development will be shared widely and fairly.

Much has been achieved. Covax has now delivered over 43m doses of vaccine to more than 100 countries. Yet low-income countries account for less than 1% of the 900 million doses administered to date. More affluent countries account for more than 83%. The vaccine gap between the richer and poorer parts of the world is growing by the day.

Finance has a critical role to play in closing that gap. While many G7 countries have been generous in their contribution to ACT-A, it is a matter of grave concern to us that the financing gap for ACT-A is \$19bn this year. As countries seek to increase vaccine coverage rates, the funding gap will grow unless countries step up support. We need action to lower costs through intellectual property waivers and the sharing of skills and resources with generic producers.

The G7 has a special responsibility in both of these areas. As a group of the world's largest economies, your financial commitments will make or break ACT-A's ambition. We therefore urge you to agree to the burden-sharing formula proposed by Norway and South Africa and sent to 89 countries, under which the G7 would collectively agree to underwrite 63 per cent of the cost of closing the financing gap.

We believe the sums involved – probably in the range of \$30bn a year - are eminently affordable, that the financing instruments are available, and that the ACT-A architecture provides an effective delivery mechanism. As the International Chamber of Commerce and

others have argued, the costs of this investment will certainly be less than the global economic disruption that accompanies low vaccination rates.

Waiving intellectual property rules – a proposal which is gaining the support of a growing number of G7 countries – gives us the opportunity not only to boost production but also to diversify the sites of production. This will reduce the period of time before herd immunity is achieved, a period during which potentially dangerous variants can emerge.

We believe that more equitable approaches to vaccination in the world's poorest countries is both an ethical obligation, and an epidemiological imperative if we are to protect vulnerable people wherever they live, including the citizens of the G7. The old axiom that 'our life and our death are with our neighbour' has never been more apt, and we urge you to respond speedily and effectively to this challenge.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

*The Right Revd. Dr Rowan Williams
Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Chair of Christian Aid*

*His Eminence Metropolitan Emmanuel, the Elder
Metropolitan of Chalcedon, representing the Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate*

*Rev. Dr Martin Junge
General Secretary, The Lutheran World Federation*

*The Most Revd. Dr Thabo Makgoba
Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town*