



Urgent action for access to COVID-19 Vaccines

Nobody should be left out

Since last year humanity was shaken by fear and uncertainty due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus, bringing to light the fragility and vulnerability of human existence. To fight against the propagation of this virus, the human family tried to adapt itself to this unprecedented and challenging situation by observing social distancing and lockdowns, the closing of borders and the massive use of digital technology. Pope Francis has often said that the virus brought us together and only in solidarity can we get out of this pandemic.

This year, vaccines have become available, thus, bringing much hope, but also a wider gap in inequality. The rich nations of the Global North that poured money into the production of the vaccines are now waiting for a return on their investment. It is believed that the “miracle” of the vaccines would reignite the global machinery. This has led to a kind of focus on the North, shown in nationalism and protectionism. The Global South, where the majority of the poor live, is left out.

Pope Francis encouraged people to get vaccinated because it was one way of exercising responsibility towards others and collective well-being. He reiterated the need for “vaccines for all, especially for the most vulnerable and needy in all regions on the planet. Before all others: the most vulnerable and needy!”¹ We are at a crucial moment, an opportunity to live the miracle of charity, through addressing together the present challenge.

The access to vaccines across the world has not been as equitable as it should be. It is sad to note that not all nations and those who want or need the vaccine can get it because of supply issues, while .in our interconnected world, the vaccines must be made available equitably.

Since every life is inviolable, nobody must be left out. The poor, minorities, refugees, the marginalised are the most exposed to the virus. Taking care of them is a moral priority because abandoning them puts them and the global community at risk. Our collective well-being depends on how we care for the least.

As we face a global emergency, political leaders must look beyond the interests of their own nations and political groups. This pandemic is a global human security problem that threatens the whole human family. Addressing the vaccines-issue from the perspective of a narrow national strategy might lead to a moral failure in meeting the needs of the most vulnerable across the globe.

The current vaccines crisis must be seen in the wider context of the global health situation. Many of the least developed nations still lack basic medical infrastructures and the means of storing the vaccines. Moreover, people in distant rural areas are not sensitised and are exposed to other infectious diseases that remain prevalent.

Given this context, the international community should have a holistic, multi-stakeholder approach to avoid the danger of the pandemic getting out of hand in the Global South which may then lead to a global humanitarian crisis again.

¹ Francis, "*Urbi et Orbi*" Message, Christmas 2020.

The debt of low-income countries should be reviewed. The remission of debt could be a means for generating funds for the multi-stakeholders, Faith-Based Organisations in particular, to upgrade the medical services and facilities in these countries. The money that is meant to pay a poor country's debt could be spent for strengthening health security.

The question of the patent on the vaccines must also be considered urgently to identify localised production in Africa, Latin America and Asia and accelerate access to the vaccines before it is too late. Involving local actors, in particular Faith-based Organisations, is important because they have the basic structures and the necessary contact with the most vulnerable people such as migrants, the internally displaced and the marginalised.

In line with the observations made by the Dicastery for promoting Integral Human development "*Vaccines for all: 20 points for a fair and healthier world,*" Caritas Internationalis urges the decision makers and the United Nations to act on the following, namely:

- Call for a Security Council meeting to address the issue of access to the vaccines as a global security problem with firm political decisions based on multilateralism.
- Undertake the debt remission of the poorest countries as quickly as possible and use the funds obtained to upgrade the medical and health systems in these countries.
- Promote the local production of vaccines in different technical hubs in Africa, Latin America and Asia and make them available in the next six months by addressing the issue of patent and technical collaboration with the poorer nations.
- Allocate financial and technical support to the local Civil Society Organisations, and to Faith-Based Organisations in particular, to ensure the preparation of local communities' awareness and capacity building to prepare them to have access to preventive care.

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