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Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 16 December 2021

[on the report of the Third Committee ([A/76/462/Add.2](#), para. 114)]

76/175. Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic

The General Assembly,

Guided by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations,

Stressing that States bear the primary responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Recalling that one of the purposes of the United Nations is to achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind,

Recalling also the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,² the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,³ the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,⁴ the Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁵ the

¹ Resolution [217 A \(III\)](#).

² See resolution [2200 A \(XXI\)](#), annex.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1249, No. 20378.

⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.



Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities⁶ and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,⁷

Recalling further other relevant international human rights instruments, including the Declaration on the Right to Development,⁸ and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action,⁹ in which it is established that all human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated,

Reaffirming its resolution 70/1 of 25 September 2015, entitled “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, and the Sustainable Development Goals enshrined therein, in particular the commitment made by all States to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, to achieve gender equality and to reduce inequalities within and among countries,

Reaffirming also its resolution 69/313 of 27 July 2015 on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, which is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Recalling its resolutions 74/270 of 2 April 2020, 74/274 of 20 April 2020 and 74/306 and 74/307 of 11 September 2020, and Human Rights Council resolutions 41/10 of 11 July 2019,¹⁰ 44/2 of 16 July 2020¹¹ and 46/14 of 23 March 2021,¹²

Noting World Health Assembly resolutions 73.1 of 19 May 2020 and 74.7 of 31 May 2021, as well as World Health Assembly decision 74(16) of 31 May 2021,

Recalling Security Council resolution 2532 (2020) of 1 July 2020,

Recognizing the appeals of the Secretary-General concerning the response to the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, with a particular emphasis on countries in need,

Recalling the outcome of the high-level meeting on universal health coverage, reaffirming its political declaration, entitled “Universal health coverage: moving together to build a healthier world”,¹³ and recognizing further that universal health coverage implies that all people have access, without discrimination, to nationally determined sets of needed promotive, preventive, curative, palliative and rehabilitative essential health-care services and essential, safe, affordable, effective and quality medicines, vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, while ensuring that the use of these services does not expose users to financial hardship, with special emphasis on the poor and other people in vulnerable situations,

Expressing solidarity with all people and countries affected by the pandemic, and condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims of COVID-19 and those whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by the pandemic,

Recognizing that the availability of vaccines, medicines, health technologies and health therapies is an essential dimension of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,

⁶ Ibid., vol. 2515, No. 44910.

⁷ Ibid., vol. 660, No. 9464.

⁸ Resolution 41/128, annex.

⁹ A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

¹⁰ See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-fourth Session, Supplement No. 53 (A/74/53)*, chap. V, sect. A.

¹¹ Ibid., *Seventy-fifth Session, Supplement No. 53 (A/75/53)*, chap. V, sect. A.

¹² Ibid., *Seventy-sixth Session, Supplement No. 53 (A/76/53)*, chap. V, sect. A.

¹³ Resolution 74/2.

Noting that, since the beginning of the vaccine roll-out, the majority of all vaccines administered have been concentrated in high-income countries, while low-income countries still lag behind in gaining access to COVID-19 vaccines,

Expressing its serious concern over the disparity between developing countries and developed countries in terms of the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, which prevents the entire international community from achieving the complete elimination of COVID-19 as soon as possible and also further hampers progress in the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Recognizing the need to tackle health inequities and inequalities within and among countries through political commitment, international cooperation and policies, including those that address the social, economic and environmental determinants of health,

Welcoming the global initiatives promoting global solidarity in response to the pandemic, including the efforts of countries that have supplied COVID-19 vaccines, and recalling the thirty-first special session of the General Assembly, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, held on 3 and 4 December 2020, and the high-level meeting of the Assembly on universal health coverage, held on 23 September 2019,

Recognizing that the encouragement and development of international partnerships and cooperation in the scientific and cultural fields contribute to the realization of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, bearing in mind that everyone has the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications,

Recognizing also the importance of international cooperation and effective multilateralism in ensuring that all States, in particular developing States, including the least developed countries, have affordable, timely, equitable and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines in order to minimize negative effects in all affected States and to avoid the resurgence of the pandemic,

Recognizing further the important role that civil society, including non-governmental organizations and women's and community-based organizations, youth-led organizations and all other stakeholders such as volunteers and national human rights institutions where they exist, as well as the academic and scientific community and the private sector play in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences,

Reaffirming the importance of improving the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines and other health products across the whole value chain,

Taking note of the guidance issued by the treaty bodies and the special procedures of the Human Rights Council on States' human rights obligations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in particular the statement issued on 15 December 2020 by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on universal and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines¹⁴ and the joint statement of several special procedure mandate holders entitled "Universal access to vaccines is essential for the prevention and containment of COVID-19 around the world",

Taking note with appreciation of the guidance note issued on 13 May 2020 by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, on human rights-compliant responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the guidance note issued by the Office on 17 December 2020, on human rights and access to COVID-19 vaccines,

¹⁴ [E/C.12/2020/2](#).

Taking note of the report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the enjoyment of human rights around the world, including good practices and areas of concern,¹⁵

Reaffirming the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, which requires that States take the steps necessary to prevent, treat and control epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases and to create the conditions that would assure medical services and medical attention for all in the event of sickness,

Deeply concerned about the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the enjoyment of human rights around the world, and emphasizing the importance of human rights in shaping the response to the pandemic, in terms of both the public health emergency and the broader impact on people's lives and livelihoods,

Underscoring that equitable access to health products is a matter of global priority and that the availability, accessibility, acceptability and affordability of health products of assured quality are fundamental to tackling the pandemic, and expressing its concern about the fact that the unequal distribution of vaccines delays the end of the pandemic,

Reaffirming the fundamental role of the United Nations system in coordinating the global response to control and contain the spread of COVID-19 and in providing support to States, and in this regard acknowledging the crucial leading role played by the World Health Organization, in line with its constitutional mandate,

Emphasizing the central role of the State in responding to pandemics and other health emergencies, and the socioeconomic consequences thereof, and in advancing sustainable development and the realization of human rights,

Recognizing the primary responsibility of States to adopt and implement responses to the COVID-19 pandemic that are specific to their national context, and that emergency measures taken by Governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic must be necessary, proportionate to the evaluated risk, applied in a non-discriminatory way, have a specific focus and duration and be in accordance with States' obligations under applicable international human rights law,

Recognizing also that the COVID-19 pandemic has a disproportionately heavy impact on women, older persons, youth and children, as well as the poor, people in vulnerable situations and migrants,

Deeply concerned about the disproportionate and negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and on gender equality worldwide, including due to the increased incidence of domestic violence and interrupted access to sexual and reproductive health, and underscoring the need to ensure a gender-sensitive and people-centred recovery with full respect for human rights, mindful in particular of the need to ensure the full enjoyment by women and girls of their human rights,

Recognizing that persons with disabilities face a greater risk of COVID-19 infection and have higher mortality rates, and face aggravated barriers to accessing COVID-19 information, as well as to timely and quality health-care services,

Deeply concerned that the COVID-19 pandemic perpetuates and exacerbates existing inequalities and that those most at risk are people in vulnerable situations, including older persons, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, local communities, indigenous peoples,

¹⁵ A/HRC/46/19.

persons deprived of their liberty, homeless persons and persons living in poverty, and recognizing the need to ensure non-discrimination and equality while stressing the importance of age-responsive and gender- and disability-sensitive measures in this regard,

Noting with concern the uneven access to quality, safe, efficacious and affordable COVID-19 vaccines and the difficulties that a large number of countries face in gaining access to and supplying them to their populations, stressing the important role of the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator initiative and of other relevant initiatives that are aimed at accelerating the development and production of and equitable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines for all countries and at strengthening health systems, and recognizing in particular the vaccines pillar of the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, which is aimed at ensuring an equitable global distribution of vaccines to all States,

Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic requires a global response that is people-centred, gender-responsive, with full respect for human rights, multidimensional, coordinated, inclusive and innovative, based on unity, solidarity and multilateral cooperation, to ensure that all States, in particular developing States, including the least developed countries, have unhindered, timely, fair and equitable access to safe diagnostics, therapeutics, medicines, vaccines and essential health technologies and their components, as well as equipment, bearing in mind that immunization against COVID-19 is a global public good for health in preventing, containing and stopping transmission, and in bringing the pandemic to an end,

Noting the oral update provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to the Human Rights Council, at its forty-eighth session, on the human rights implications of the lack of affordable, timely, equitable and universal access to and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and the deepening inequalities between States, including the related vulnerabilities and challenges and the impact on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health,

Noting also the Strategy to Achieve Global COVID-19 Vaccination by mid-2022 developed by the secretariat of the World Health Organization, which outlines the urgent actions required by the global community to vaccinate 40 per cent of the population of all countries against COVID-19 by the end of 2021 and 70 per cent by mid-2022, anchored in the principles of equity, quality, integration and inclusivity,

1. *Emphasizes* the urgent need to ensure the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and to facilitate the development of robust health systems and universal health coverage, encompassing universal, timely and equitable access to all essential health technologies, diagnostics, therapeutics, medicines and vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and other health emergencies, in order to ensure full access to immunization for all, in particular people in vulnerable situations, as a matter of global priority for all States;

2. *Calls upon* States and other relevant stakeholders to take appropriate measures to guarantee fair, transparent, equitable, efficient, universal and timely access to and distribution of safe, quality, efficacious, effective, accessible and affordable COVID-19 vaccines and to enable international cooperation;

3. *Calls for* the accelerated provision of 550 million more doses of COVID-19 vaccines to the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility by the end of December 2021 in order to get on track to ensure global access to vaccines to face the pandemic;

4. *Also calls for* intensified international cooperation and solidarity to contain, mitigate and overcome the pandemic and its consequences, through responses that are people-centred, gender-responsive, multidimensional, coordinated, inclusive, innovative, swift and decisive at all levels, with full respect for human rights, including by supporting the exchange of information, scientific knowledge and best practices, and enhancing capacity in particular to assist people in vulnerable situations, and the poorest and most vulnerable countries, to build a more equitable, inclusive, sustainable and resilient future and to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;¹⁶

5. *Encourages* States to work in partnership with all relevant stakeholders to increase research and development funding for vaccines, medicines, therapeutics and diagnostics, leverage digital technologies and strengthen the scientific international cooperation necessary to combat COVID-19 and to bolster coordination, including with the private sector, towards the further development, manufacturing and distribution of diagnostics, antiviral medicines, therapeutics, personal protective equipment and vaccines while adhering to the objectives of quality, efficacy, safety, equity, accessibility and affordability;

6. *Recognizes* the importance of tools to achieve extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good for health in preventing, containing and stopping transmission, and to bring the pandemic to an end, by ensuring the availability of safe, quality, efficacious, effective, accessible and affordable vaccines;

7. *Calls upon* States and other relevant stakeholders to remove unjustified obstacles restricting the export of COVID-19 vaccines, resulting in an unequal distribution in access thereto between developed and developing countries, and to promote the equitable global distribution of and universal access to vaccines, in order to further the principles of international cooperation and solidarity, to end the current pandemic and to promote the realization of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health;

8. *Urges* States to facilitate the trade in, acquisition of, access to and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines as a crucial element of their responses to the pandemic, to ensure the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and to support the administration of vaccines to address the pandemic, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and in accordance with the relevant international legal frameworks, including international human rights obligations, taking into account the principles of non-discrimination and transparency;

9. *Reiterates* the call for States to continue to collaborate, as appropriate, on models and approaches that support the delinking of the cost of new research and development from the prices of medicines, vaccines and diagnostics for diseases, to ensure their sustained accessibility, affordability and availability and to support access to treatment for all those in need;

10. *Calls upon* States and all relevant stakeholders to promote research and capacity-building initiatives and to enhance cooperation on and access to science, innovation, technologies, technical assistance, transfer of technology and knowledge-sharing, to ensure universal, equitable and affordable access for all persons to COVID-19 vaccines, including through improved coordination among mechanisms, especially with developing countries, in a collaborative, coordinated and transparent manner and on mutually agreed terms, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and towards advancing the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals;

¹⁶ Resolution 70/1.

11. *Urges* States to leverage digital technologies for the response to COVID-19, including in support of efficient, transparent and robust immunization, addressing the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19, paying particular attention to digital inclusion, patient empowerment and the right to privacy and protection of personal data;

12. *Reaffirms* the right of States to use, to the fullest extent, the provisions of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) and the flexibilities therein, as reaffirmed in the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which recognizes that intellectual property protection is important for the development of new medicines and also recognizes the concerns about its effects on prices and recognizes further that the Agreement should be interpreted and implemented in a manner supportive of the right of States to protect public health, in particular to promote access to medicines for all, to facilitate access for all to COVID-19 vaccines and to bolster coordination, including with the private sector, towards the rapid development, manufacturing and distribution of vaccines, while adhering to the objectives of transparency, efficacy, safety, equity, accessibility and affordability;

13. *Calls upon* States, other partners and donors to urgently support funding and close the funding gap for the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and its mechanisms, such as the COVAX Facility, to support the equitable distribution of diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines and to further explore innovative financing mechanisms aimed at ensuring affordable, timely, equitable and universal access to, and the fair distribution of, COVID-19 vaccines for all and the continuity and strengthening of essential health-care services;

14. *Welcomes* steps taken to provide a suspension of debt service payments for the poorest countries, and by international financial institutions to provide liquidity and other support measures to ease the debt burden of developing countries, and encourages all relevant actors, including private and commercial creditors, to address risks of debt vulnerabilities, through existing channels, in developing countries due to the pandemic;

15. *Notes* the most recent decision of the International Monetary Fund to allocate special drawing rights to boost global liquidity and enhance the resilience of the international monetary system, as part of ongoing efforts to support a comprehensive response to and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and, in this regard, highlights the call for countries to consider voluntarily channelling unutilized special drawing rights, in accordance with national laws and regulations, to the countries which are most in need, including the middle-income countries, to better support sustainable development and a more inclusive recovery, and stresses the importance of ensuring equal access to such resources, to guarantee timely and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines;

16. *Calls upon* the international community to continue to assist developing countries in promoting the full realization of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the right of everyone to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, including through access to medicines that are affordable, safe, efficacious and of quality and through financial and technical support for and training of personnel, while recognizing that the primary responsibility for promoting and protecting all human rights rests with States;

17. *Requests* all States, international organizations and relevant stakeholders to support transparency in all matters relating to the production, distribution and fair pricing of vaccines, in accordance with national and regional legal frameworks and contexts, and urges States to take immediate steps to prevent speculation and undue

export controls and stockpiling that may hinder affordable, timely, equitable and universal access for all countries to COVID-19 vaccines;

18. *Recognizes* the immense logistical challenges posed by the lack of infrastructure for the distribution of vaccines in developing countries, including the least developed countries, and calls for greater assistance and building the capacities of developing countries, including through effective training programmes in vaccine delivery in this regard;

19. *Strongly urges* all States to refrain from taking any economic, financial or trade measures that may adversely affect equitable, affordable, fair, timely and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines, in particular in developing countries;

20. *Urges* Member States to promote an enhanced response to future pandemics based on experience gained and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and other public health emergencies of international concern, including by building, strengthening and maintaining the capacities required under the International Health Regulations (2005)¹⁷ and by supporting the ongoing efforts in the World Health Assembly to consider the benefits of developing a World Health Organization convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic preparedness and response, while taking into account all the obstacles that impeded the effective response to, and treatment of, the disease as well as the need for all countries to have unhindered access to vaccines and essential health products;

21. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session on the implementation of the present resolution.

*53rd plenary meeting
16 December 2021*

¹⁷ World Health Organization, document WHA58/2005/REC/1, resolution 58.3, annex.