

Vatican diplomat: “A Vaccine For All”

16 April 2021

Statement At The ECOSOC Special Ministerial Meeting “A Vaccine For All”

By Msgr. Mirosław Wachowski, Under-Secretary for Relations with States

Ecosoc Special Ministerial Meeting “A Vaccine for All”

United Nations Headquarters, 16 April 2021

Mr. President,

The COVID-19 pandemic has enveloped the entire world in a shared experience of illness, fear and loss and it has reminded us of our deep interconnectedness. We must work in fraternal solidarity to emerge from it together. Exercising that solidarity through universal access to vaccines, especially for those most in need, must be a priority.

Even as wealthy nations are now vaccinating their populations, many countries in the Global South have no vaccines at all. The Secretary-General’s recent assertion that 75% of all vaccines have been distributed in 10 countries, while 130 countries have zero vaccinations, is alarming. Due to poverty and fragile health infrastructures, billions of people live in what Pope Francis calls as a sort of “pharmaceutical marginality,” which is why he has said that “at an ethical level, if there is a possibility of curing a disease with a drug, it should be available to everyone, otherwise it creates injustice.”[1: Pope Francis, Address to the Members of the Banco Farmaceutico Foundation, 19 September 2020.] The consequences of long delays in vaccination in the poorest countries means that there will be more needless deaths, as well as damage to healthcare, education, and poverty eradication efforts.

The international community must work together for the common good and find creative solutions. Enabling the production of vaccines in Africa, Asia, and Latin America through the sharing of patent information and through technical collaboration could accelerate the vaccination rate significantly while also building healthcare system capacity. Furthermore, it is crucial to provide them with the infrastructure to receive, store, transport and distribute vaccines across their territories. The Holy See welcomes the efforts undertaken through COVAX, which has begun delivering vaccines to developing countries and has pledged to meet at least twenty percent of the need. Pledges from governments and pharmaceutical companies to share vaccines with those most in need are also hopeful signs.

Furthermore, civil society organizations, and faith-based organizations in particular, play a key role in expanding the vaccinations. Supporting them and unleashing their full vitality can strengthen healthcare in the future.

In order to facilitate not only the local participation in vaccine development and distribution, but also to help developing countries recover from COVID-19, the question of their crippling debt burdens, worsened by the economic devastation caused by the pandemic, must be addressed. Debt forgiveness could free up funds that would allow such countries to improve healthcare systems and access to medical care, including in response to COVID-19.

Mr. President, we must act on the commitment to ensure equitable access to vaccines for all by working together in service of this common goal. Today’s meeting is an important step toward the concrete action needed to meet that urgent aim.

Thank you