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UNAIDS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REMARKS

The challenge of a lifetime: Ensuring universal access to COVID-19 health technologies
High Level Virtual Event at the margins of the 75th UN General Assembly

25 September 2020

President Quesada – Thank you. We salute you.

The world will remember Costa Rica's leadership for a COVID-19 vaccine.

Your Excellencies,

A vaccine is our greatest hope of rising up from this crisis.

It is the signal that tells our loved ones "it's safe again". It is the tool that gets the wheels of global trade turning again.

And being able to access that COVID-19 vaccine is the human right of each and every one of us.

But Excellencies, the truth is: we are heading the wrong way. It is time to raise the alarm.

The only place where a COVID-19 vaccine is a global public good is in rhetoric. Not reality.

Billions of dollars of taxpayers public funding have been invested into the development of a vaccine. We congratulate the hard work of scientists – and, yes, of pharma corporations too.

And yet despite that – all the knowledge and technology to make them remains a secret. It is the private property of companies.

Let us be clear. Pharma corporations, not governments, are calling the shots.

How can that be? How can it be that ending the greatest crisis we've faced in a generation awaits the benevolence of big pharma giants?

- They are deciding how many vaccines get made.
- They are deciding what price is charged.
- They are deciding who gets them.

The implications are clear. Oxfam's research shows that rich countries representing 13% of the world's population have secured half the vaccine supplies belonging to the major candidates.

And Excellences we have been here before. Do I need to remind us of the 10 million lives needlessly lost to AIDS? That is what happened the last time we relied on the good will of pharmaceutical corporations in a crisis.

Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it. Today's monopolistic model will not make the world safe again. It never has.

This is why we need a People's Vaccine. I am proud to be part of a diverse and global alliance calling for a People's Vaccine.

Together we believe that there must be safe and effective vaccines for everyone. Vaccines that are fairly and speedily distributed across the world – free of charge - according to need and not ability to pay. We need a people's vaccine not a profit vaccine.

To do so –

First: we need to maximize supply. No single pharma company can make enough vaccine for the world. We need to unlock huge manufacturing capacity for the vaccine.

To do this all pharma corporations must openly share their know-how and technology for producing their vaccines free of patent and monopoly.

This know-how and technology can then be shared with as many producers as possible. Once we have more producers, we have more doses, and there will be no need for this self-defeating vaccine bidding war in which the most at-risk populations will always lose.

To achieve this, we must push harder on CTAP, CTAP, CTAP. This is the most important multilateral solution we have on the table to unlock supply. The World Health Organization have shown us how access pools work, for example with the medicines patent pool. We welcome COVAX, but we need its spirit of solidarity to extend to sharing technology and intellectual property for the global public good.

For this to work we also need more investment in vaccine manufacturing in more regions of the world; to supply the people in this pandemic, and be ready to serve them again, in the next one.

Vaccine nationalism is self-defeating for everyone. Including in rich countries - lives and economies will still be at risk as long as people in the world are unprotected. We must do all we can to push for a fair distribution of what we have but what we have is not enough. There can be no excuses and no delays to sharing the research, the know-how, the technology so we can scale up fast, and fulfil everyone's right to be protected.

We must work together to see our economies and humanity rise up from this crisis.

The time has come for a People's Vaccine.

