

December 8, 2020

The Honorable Robert Lighthizer  
U.S. Trade Representative  
Office of the U.S. Trade Representative  
600 17<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20508

Dear U.S. Trade Representative Lighthizer:

We, the undersigned, call on you during this global health emergency to commit to a just and equitable policy toward the development, manufacture, and distribution of a vaccine. We are people of faith who, though representing diverse spiritualities and religious practices, believe that the lives of each person -- young or old, indigenous or migrant, laborer or CEO -- are equally beloved as people of God, and that it is our responsibility to ensure the preservation and dignity of all lives.

In its early days, the virus momentarily revived a sense of global community. Impervious to borders, wealth, or level of development, it spread across the globe, reminding us, as Pope Francis noted, that we are “all in the same boat, where one person’s problems are the problems of all.”<sup>1</sup> Yet nearly a year after its emergence, the contagion has continued to rage, taking the lives of over a million people and straining human and material resources, causing this sense of the common good to wane. We must remember that the health of all of us depends on the health of each one of us, and act accordingly in order to remove any barriers to saving lives. For as these words from the Quran remind us: “If anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of the whole humanity.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Removal of Barriers to Vaccine Production**

- Our best hope rests on the development of a vaccine. The World Health Organization (WHO) and associate groups secured the commitment and funding of 82 developed nations and 92 lower-income nations to the COVAX Facility platform to support the research, development, and manufacturing of over 150 possible vaccines with the goal of producing and distributing 2 billion doses by the end of 2021. Each participant nation will receive enough vaccines for 20 percent of their population, ostensibly enough to inoculate health care workers, the elderly, and those most at risk. The United States

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter “Fratelli tutti”, n. 32.

<sup>2</sup> The Quran 5:32.

withdrew from the WHO and is pursuing its own program, Operation Warp Speed. The U.S. should rejoin the global effort to produce a viable vaccine. As Pope Francis reminds us, “no one is saved alone; we can only be saved together.”<sup>3</sup>

- In October, the World Trade Organization (WTO) discussed invoking a waiver of International Property rights under the TRIPS Agreement in order to enable access to Covid -19 treatments. In this ongoing global emergency, all nations must cooperate for the common good, and it is essential that we do not let intellectual property rights create “barriers to the timely access to affordable medical products including vaccines and medicines or to scaling-up of research, development, manufacturing and supply of medical products essential to combat COVID-19.”<sup>4</sup> A waiver would enable widespread manufacturing on a scale needed to quell the pandemic, keep costs affordable, and ensure equal access. As Russell Moore, of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, stated, “Each human life is more significant than a trillion-dollar gross national product. Stocks and bonds are important, yes, but human beings are created in the image of God.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Equitable and Timely Distribution**

- A vaccine should be distributed both equally and timely, so that every health care and essential worker and those at highest risk of infection are inoculated first regardless of where they live or the level of wealth or development of the state.
- The U.S. government should take a lead in sharing critical vaccine technology and know-how by enabling technology transfer to qualified vaccine manufacturers around the world in order to meet the global demand for Covid-19 vaccines.
- Rather than adhering to strict quotas, distribution should be according to need. WHO Director-General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, noted that “We have learned the hard way that the fastest way to end this pandemic and to reopen economies is to start by protecting the highest risk populations everywhere, rather than the entire populations of just some countries.”<sup>6</sup>
- Vulnerable populations, such as prisoners, migrants, and those living in crowded or unsanitary conditions must be a priority, despite the logistical difficulties.

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter “Fratelli tutti”, n. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Doc IP/C/W/669.

<sup>5</sup> Russell Moore, “God Doesn’t Want Us to Sacrifice the Old,” *New York Times*, 26 March 2020.

<sup>6</sup> “WHO Director on nationalisation of vaccine and reaction to Pope’s words,” *Vatican News*, 19 August 2020. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/world/news/2020-08/who-director-we-need-to-prevent-vaccine-nationalism.html>

Going forward, the policies of the United States must be one of solidarity with all peoples in order to respect and promote human life and dignity. The words of Jeremiah 8:22 ring loudly today: “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?” We must act accordingly, for the very nature of this disease is that a threat to any one life is a threat to all.

Signed,

NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
American Muslim Health  
Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative  
United Church of Christ  
Disciples Center for Public Policy  
Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns  
Shifa Ghizia Mohiuddin  
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Bread for the World  
American Jewish World Service  
Office of Peacebuilding and Policy, Church of the Brethren

Cc: Honorable Charles Grassley  
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee

Honorable Ron Wyden  
Ranking Member, Senate Finance Committee

Honorable Richard Neal  
Chairman, House Ways and Means Committee

Honorable Rep. Kevin Brady,  
Ranking Member, House Ways and Means Committee