

8th ACT-Accelerator Facilitation Council

9th December 2021

Intervention by Dr Fifa A Rahman, affiliated to Health Poverty Action

Thank you Chair.

On behalf of civil society on the ACT-Accelerator, I am delivering this intervention in an environment where there is widespread vaccine inequity and worsening therapeutics and diagnostics inequity. This week we discovered that 100m doses of vaccines in HICs will expire - vaccines that could have gone to LMICs. We note the appointment of Ted Chaiban to lead Delivery of COVID Vaccines and look forward to working with him.

We'd like to thank FIND for all their work to establish evidence on self-testing and to pilot test and treat regimes. In environments where vaccine equity is poor, we need robust test-and-treat strategies to save lives. We are extremely frustrated that WHO guidelines on self-tests will only come at the end of Q1 2022 - when all of us in the Global North (and the wealthy in the Global South) are self-testing regularly. Q1 2022 is too late, and this slowness is not only driving real inequity between the haves and have-nots, but also bodes poorly for future pandemic response. These so-called expedited emergency processes are simply *not* expeditious enough.

One of the most urgent political messages is the one on intellectual property. We were pleased to hear at Africa CDC's Stakeholder Engagement Meeting this week from His Excellency Wamkele Mene, who said that an appropriate IP agenda is needed to service Africa's public health needs. We also agree with your comments Dr Nkengasong, who said that "If we wait for vaccines at the rate they are coming now, we will be wiped out" and that they are "defining the terms of our survival". Based on this, we call on the United States and the EU to invest urgent political capital in advancing work on textual negotiations on the TRIPS waiver. The stagnancy on this cannot stand.

Thirdly, we have also seen in the past two weeks travel bans arising from the identification of the Omicron variant - travel bans that defeat the paeans of solidarity that we claim to espouse because they target African countries exclusively. In Mia Malan's article this week in the Daily Maverick, we saw how the team that identified Omicron was unable to get the shipment of chemicals required to detect the variant due to the travel ban. We echo the words of President Masisi of Botswana - that these travel bans are demeaning, degrading, and that they espouse neo-imperialist thinking. Many of the leaders of countries establishing travel bans have in the past claimed that Black Lives Matter - but these past weeks send the message that Black science doesn't matter, that Black economies don't matter - all things that Black lives are dependent on. There's a term for this - "performative allyship". It is grotesque, and it is hurting our global collective response.

And finally, a message to the Global South. More than ever, this pandemic has shown that in the hour of greatest need, when there are 6-8 times as many vaccine boosters being given in the Global North than primary doses given in LICs, that the Global South cannot rely on the Global North for COVID-19 equity. We laud high level discussions at the Africa CDC's this week on the need for a new public health order for Africa, including vaccine manufacturing, and a robust continental strategy to reduce dependence on foreign aid and external suppliers. And while we support these regional efforts wholeheartedly - more is needed. We urge all Global South countries to convene urgent South-South summits on economic integration and increased cooperation so that these problems do not arise again in future pandemics.

Thank you.