

Open Letter to G7 Leaders on Quick and Equitable Global Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines

At its Annual Members' Meeting, held electronically on 15-17 June 2021, Council for World Mission (CWM) reflected on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on peoples and countries around the world, with particular attention given to vaccine distribution. We issue this open letter out of deep concern for a more just and globally coordinated response to the pandemic, in general, and to the vaccine distribution, in particular.

CWM notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has, more than ever, exposed the inequalities within and between nations. Our own global community has witnessed an increase of deaths on the margins, due to shortage of medical infrastructure and supplies, governmental corruption, unemployment, fanaticism, mental health crises, fear, profiteering from the crisis, decisions about who should be left to die, hunger and so much more that we do not yet know.

In an agreement at the June 2021 G7 summit, hosted in the United Kingdom last week, leaders committed to sharing at least 870 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine directly, to deliver at least half by the end of 2021. They also reaffirmed their support for the COVAX scheme as “the primary route for providing vaccines to the poorest countries.” The G7 countries - Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States - have so far purchased over a third of the world's vaccine supply, while making up 13% of the global population¹. Governments in these wealthier countries, including the UK, are already planning for the booster doses that are needed for their own populations to remain protected.

The COVAX scheme hopes to distribute enough vaccines to protect at least 20% of the population in 92 low- or medium-income countries, starting with healthcare workers and the most vulnerable groups. Even if COVAX meets these goals, they would fall far short of the level of immunity that experts say is needed to end the pandemic. The WHO has suggested that figure is at least 70%.

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-55795297>

Its initial goal was to provide two billion doses of vaccines worldwide in 2021, and 1.8 billion doses to 92 poorer countries by early 2022². COVAX has so far shipped 87 million COVID-19 vaccines to 131 participants³ (including G7 nation, Canada⁴).

UNICEF – a major partner in the COVAX scheme - suggested that as many as 1 billion doses may be available for donation by the G7 countries by the end of 2021, without significant delay to current plans to vaccinate their own adult populations⁵. This pledge, therefore, to deliver 435 million doses by year-end falls far short of this capacity.

More than two billion doses of coronavirus vaccines have now been administered globally, in over 190 countries. While some countries have fully vaccinated a large proportion of their population, however, many more have only just begun, and in some cases are still waiting for their first doses to arrive.

The Council for World Mission notes the words of World Health Organisation (WHO) Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, following this pledge:

*"Many other countries are now facing a surge in cases – and they are facing it without vaccines. We are in the race of our lives, but it's not a fair race, and most countries have barely left the starting line. We welcome... announcements about donations of vaccines and thank leaders. But we need more, and we need them faster."*⁶

In the words of WHO, "nobody wins the race until everyone wins."⁷

We also note our concern regarding the necessity for multilateral development banks to urgently release funding to help countries prepare their health systems for a large-scale rollout of vaccines in the coming months. We would hope that this release of funds does not take the form of further debt for already pressurised economies.

In the light of these facts, and the continuing inequitable distribution of vaccines globally, and in line with its core values, the Council for World Mission respectfully urges the United Kingdom and other G7 nations to:

1. radically rethink their financial contribution and sharing commitments towards controlling this pandemic
 - avoiding buying more than their own populations require
 - avoiding profiteering at the expense of life

² <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/covax-explained>

³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-55795297>

⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-55932997>

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccine-dose-donations-g7-letter>

⁶ <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-06-2021-g7-announces-pledges-of-870-million-covid-19-vaccine-doses-of-which-at-least-half-to-be-delivered-by-the-end-of-2021>

⁷ <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax>

2. use the COVAX scheme, rather than distributing vaccines directly, to ensure proper process
3. where relevant, reinstate their commitment to a UN foreign aid budget target of 0.7% of GDP

Council for World Mission is a worldwide partnership of Christian churches comprising 25 million Christians in 50,000 congregations in 32 member churches in over 30 countries in Africa, the Caribbean, East Asia, Europe, the Pacific and South Asia. The 32 member churches are committed to sharing their resources of money, people, skills and insights globally to carry out God's mission locally.

Our core values are justice in relationships, mutuality, equality and interdependence, generosity of spirit and unity in diversity. We are committed to seeing people thrive in life-flourishing communities.

Signed:

Rev Lydia Neshangwe, Moderator

Rev Dr Collin Cowan, General Secretary

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