

## **The commitment to vaccine justice and global health must be further strengthened.**

Statement of the Board of the German Commission for Justice and Peace  
(09<sup>th</sup> of December 2021)

In June 2021, the Executive Board of the German Commission for Justice and Peace explained in an orientation paper how the international distribution of Corona vaccines can be organised equitably and in solidarity. Since then, it has fortunately been possible to further expand the production capacities for vaccines. Vaccine companies from Europe and the United States have announced that they are also going to set up new production facilities in countries of the Global South. Nevertheless, many countries in the Global South are still severely undersupplied. On the African continent, for example, only 7% of the population had been fully vaccinated by 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2021, according to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. In 82 countries of the world, higher vaccination rates failed due to a lack of vaccine supply, according to a statement from WHO advisor Bruce Aylward from October 2021. Vaccines that are in high demand because they are particularly effective, such as the mRNA vaccines from BioNTech-Pfizer and Moderna, remain a scarce commodity. We are highly concerned about this, also because the effects of the pandemic on the health sector and all other sectors will further set back the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the achievement of which was already at risk before the outbreak of the pandemic (mainly due to the insufficient funds made available). Last but not least, socio-economic inequalities threaten to grow further. The slow pace of vaccination also delays economic recovery and investments necessary to contain the pandemic and its economic and social consequences become much more expensive for the countries of the Global South because they are confronted with a higher interest burden and they have less tax revenue at their disposal.

For these reasons, we call on the government of the Federal Republic of Germany to significantly accelerate and expand their efforts to strengthen global health in the new legislative period. In order to achieve this goal, we recommend that the Federal Government take the following measures:

- The German government should do more to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the targets set out in their indicators. To this end, the German government should, among other things, increase its investments in strengthening health systems.
- We welcome the fact that the parties of the new government coalition have spoken out in their coalition agreement in favour of continuing to promote the One Health approach. We also consider it a positive signal that the new federal government wants to increase its commitment to the expansion of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and to the fight against poverty-related and neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).
- Due to the pandemic, it is more urgent than ever to achieve the goal of universal health coverage (UHC), including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health services and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all (SDG 3, Target 3.8), as soon as possible. In future, the German government should make a stronger contribution to achieving this goal.
- Vaccines and medicines to fight epidemics and pandemics, as well as relevant medical technologies such as diagnostic procedures and medical oxygen, must be treated as a global common good. Accordingly, governments and pharmaceutical companies must fulfil their responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to these vaccines, medicines and medical technologies.
- The COVAX initiative, established under ACT-A (Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator) to procure and distribute vaccines globally, remains an important building block to enable equitable distribution of vaccines against the Corona virus. We therefore welcome the announcement by the new coalition government to strengthen COVAX through additional financial support and the rapid delivery of vaccines. Equally welcome is the announcement that the new government is going to work to ensure that the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance) is adequately funded. In addition, the German government should also strengthen the other pillars of ACT-A, which focus on diagnostics, medicines and health system strengthening, both financially and politically.
- In order to enable universal access to vaccines and medicines and thus also successful pandemic control, access to technologies, patents and knowledge for the (further) development and production of these medicines and vaccines is necessary in addition to strengthening COVAX and expanding production capacities in the Global North. In this

sense, it is right that the new government wants to promote voluntary production partnerships and the transfer of know-how. However, it is apparent that not only the debate on the TRIPS waiver currently seems to be deadlocked, but also the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) and the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) in the context of the Corona pandemic have so far remained largely unsuccessful. Support for the mRNA hubs in Argentina, Brazil and South Africa has largely failed to materialise. For this reason, the new German government and the newly elected German parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) should also create a legal basis and possibly incentive systems for companies to ensure that the transfer of knowledge and technology to the countries of the Global South can take place to a much greater extent. Corresponding contractual obligations should be considered in the financing of research projects by the public sector. All this would promote the establishment of additional vaccine production in the countries of the Global South. Such production, possibly at lower cost, would facilitate access to corona vaccines in countries of the Global South. Local vaccine production can also significantly increase the acceptance of vaccines and thus the urgently needed willingness to vaccinate. A transfer of knowledge also offers the chance that this could accelerate the development of further mRNA vaccines, with the help of which certain neglected tropical diseases can be combated. Since mRNA vaccines can also be produced more quickly, more cheaply and with less biotechnological effort than, for example, vector vaccines, they also have the potential to respond even more quickly to local disease outbreaks by establishing a global, decentralised vaccine production.

- It must be ensured that surplus vaccines from Germany and other European countries are passed on to countries in the Global South in good time before the expiry date - and taking into account the logistical circumstances. The German government should offer logistical support for the distribution. In doing so, the fatal impression in the recipient countries that surplus vaccines from Germany are of inferior quality (less safe and effective) and have therefore become "shopkeepers" in Germany should be counteracted.
- At the same time, it is understandable that many voices from the Global South are pushing for equal access to the particularly in-demand mRNA vaccines for the populations of the Global South. After all, access to the vaccines approved in all countries of the European Union is not only a question of justice because of the particularly high effectiveness of these vaccines, but also because other vaccines are not recognised in many countries of the European Union. People vaccinated with another vaccine are then treated like unvaccinated people. They are subject to the same restrictions as the

unvaccinated, and thus may be subject to quarantine obligations that only apply to the unvaccinated. This creates additional inequalities.

- Contractual clauses that prevent, make it more difficult or more expensive to transfer vaccines to countries of the Global South should no longer be included in future contracts with vaccine manufacturers. With regard to existing contracts, pressure should be increased on manufacturers not to make use of such clauses. The fact that distributing vaccines as quickly as possible and as comprehensively as possible is not only a question of justice, but also in the self-interest of the Global North, becomes clear from the fact that the risk of the emergence of new virus variants increases with low vaccination rates. This goes hand in hand with the danger that current vaccines will be less effective and the pandemic will be unnecessarily prolonged. In this sense, it is true that "No one is safe, unless everyone is safe".
- We welcome the agreement in the coalition agreement that the new government is going to work to strengthen and reform the World Health Organisation (WHO). This should include strengthening the political role of the WHO. In order to strengthen the global health architecture, as envisaged by the new coalition government, it is necessary to improve the interaction between WHO and GFATM (Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria), GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation), CEPI (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) and other important actors in global health as well as with the other organisations and organs of the United Nations. At the same time, the Federal Government should increase the financial contributions of the Federal Republic of Germany to the WHO to ensure that the WHO has the resources it needs to fulfil its diverse tasks, including as a coordinating organisation for global health and an advisory service on the ground, independent of particular interests. In this context, an increase in flexible funds not bound to one specific topic or project is particularly necessary to give the WHO more leeway in its funding decisions.
- During the pandemic, the fatal consequences resulting from structural deficits in the field of global health have become visible. In order to meet these comprehensive and manifold challenges, the members of the Subcommittee on Global Health (Unterausschuss Globale Gesundheit) asked the Presidium of the German Parliament (Präsidium des Deutschen Bundestages) Presidium at the end of the 19th legislative period to transform the Subcommittee into a regular standing committee. In our opinion, this would give the topic a prominent role in the parliamentary work and enable coherence with different disciplines.

- The local population in the Global South should be more involved in health issues in the future. Religious communities and civil society groups such as trade unions, patients' associations or other forms of self-organisation, independent science and the media contribute to articulating local needs. Taking these perspectives and local circumstances into account is essential for equitable health care beyond pandemic response.

The still urgent and serious emergency situation in many regions of the world and the considerable structural deficits in the area of global health make rapid and comprehensive action necessary. We therefore call on the Federal Government to implement appropriate measures. In this way, the Federal Government would make an important contribution to the realisation of the human right to health and to the solution of the urgent challenges in the field of global health.

The **German Commission for Justice and Peace (Justitia et Pax Germany)** was founded in 1967 and considers itself a forum of Catholic institutions and organisations active in the field of international responsibility of the Church in Germany. Justitia et Pax is their common voice in society and politics and thus an actor in political dialogue. The Commission develops church contributions to Germany's development, peace and human rights policy and develops concepts for the international work of the Catholic Church.