



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

28 January 2021

Dear Mark,

It is critical that the humanitarian community works together to support fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatment and ensure these efforts do not come at the expense of other lifesaving health and humanitarian interventions. As new variants of the virus are identified throughout the globe, it becomes ever clearer that universal access to the COVID-19 vaccine is the only solution to end the pandemic and mitigate the deepening socio-economic inequalities caused by measures to reduce the spread of the virus, as you have rightly highlighted in the 2021 GHO.

Our NGO members fully support the UN 'system-wide' approach and initiatives aimed at supporting national authorities to uphold their responsibility ensure quality vaccines reach all people living within their borders, particularly the most vulnerable. As NGOs we stand ready to support ongoing UN planning and advocacy efforts in this regard, including through engaging major humanitarian donors to ensure they do not prioritize only the needs of their own populations without consideration of the needs of others. It is paramount to ensure that refugees, IDPS, asylum seekers, migrants, stateless people, indigenous populations and those living in conflict zones have access to vaccines on equal grounds with the rest of the population, and as per priority criteria recommended by WHO.

NGOs note the important work that is taking place around the development of a COVAX Humanitarian Buffer, although we emphasize that such a buffer should in no way be considered an excuse for states to shirk their responsibilities. We recognize this buffer will be essential to cover vulnerable populations in situations where they are excluded from national efforts, whether on grounds of ethnicity, nationality, migration status, gender identity, poverty, or other grounds. We are particularly concerned with reports that 1) many Member States will be unable or unwilling to roll out national vaccination programs that inclusively cover all people within their territory or jurisdiction; and 2) the humanitarian buffer currently has zero allocated doses and lacks sufficient funding to support both supply and distribution of vaccines through this laudable initiative. We call on the UN and its Member States to ensure that this humanitarian buffer is realized with urgency.

In accordance with the recently endorsed IASC Minimum Standards on Duty of Care, our collective responsibility must extend to all humanitarian workers, regardless of their contract status or organization type and indiscriminate of whether they are international or national staff. We will support NGO advocacy efforts to reinforce that all humanitarian workers should be included in national vaccination schemes. Where international support for these vaccinations is required, managing access to the vaccine must be based solely on the prioritization of individuals and groups in line with the WHO-established criteria. Any transparent and equitable approach cannot be based on an individual's employer, contract type or nationality. We welcome reports that processes have started in various countries, aiming at verifying information on UN and NGO personnel to inform these discussions. We request your support to ensure a clear and timely message is shared that these processes must be inclusive, as a first principle, of the national staff of our local humanitarian partners as well as of IASC members themselves.

The extension of system-wide support to the safety and health of vulnerable communities and humanitarian workers should be a clear priority for the IASC and all its members. We request clear

communication and leadership in this matter from yourself and the other IASC Principals to ensure the humanitarian sector at large moves ahead collectively in this great endeavor.

NGOs stand ready to support and co-lead interagency work for the benefit of all humanitarian workers, working hand in hand with our IASC colleagues. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss further this important issue amongst the IASC Principals, with the firm belief that under your leadership, this platform plays a crucial role in providing solutions to such vital and complex issues.

With best regards

Ignacio Packer and Roger Yates, ICVA

Sam Worthington, InterAction

Gareth Price-Jones and Abby Maxman, SCHR