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**Mr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus**

**Director-General**

**World Health Organisation**

**WHO Headquarters**

**Avenue Appia 20**

**Geneva**

**Switzerland**

Lomé, 07 April 2021

Dear Director General,

**African workers' support for COVAX and call for more support to Africa**

The African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation\* ([www.ituc-africa.org](http://www.ituc-africa.org)) conveys her warm courtesies and refers you to the above mentioned subject matter.

We and our affiliates have been active in contributing to efforts at the national, regional and continental levels in the fight to contain and defeat COVID-19 pandemic.

We commend and appreciate the WHO's efforts in leading the charge against this global health crisis. Importantly, we salute the WHO for engineering the partnership initiative that brought about the "Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator programme.

We concur that *"the ACT-Accelerator is a ground-breaking global collaboration to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines"*.

As organised labour, we have always advocated the relevance and need for genuine and broad global partnership, collaboration and solidarity as necessary means to fight and rein in COVID-19. We are happy to note that the ACT-Accelerator is testimony to what global partnership and collaboration can bring about.

We applaud progress with COVAX, which is the vaccines pillar of the ACT-Accelerator and is aimed at accelerating the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines and to guarantee fair and equitable access for all people of every country.

However, Mr Director-General, while we strive to keep our optimism high and hopeful about efforts towards equitable access for testing, treatment and vaccines for all, we wish to express a few concerns of African trade unions:

1. Organised Labour across Africa is worried about the growing vaccines nationalism that we are witnessing. We had thought that it should be simple and clear to all that no one is safe unless everyone is safe everywhere. Sadly, this is

not the case. We are concerned that the challenges of access to vaccines for our continent and people include financing, licensing and production capacities.

The ITUC-Africa reiterates its support for your organisation's efforts given that this vaccine nationalism if not effectively tamed and resolved may undermine and possibly torpedo the laudable efforts of the WHO. The global economic model which has failed to deliver public goods should not again be allowed to condemn billions of the world's vulnerable and poor populations to the dangers posed by the coronavirus for public health and livelihoods. We, therefore urge the WHO to stay focused and resolute in advancing the aims of COVAX. Africa is expectant!

2. We are also concerned about delays in securing supplies of SII-produced COVID-19 Vaccines. We are aware that participating economies in the COVAX Facility that have been allocated doses from the AstraZeneca manufacturing network have been notified that some first deliveries anticipated in March will now take place in April. Further updates show that delays in securing supplies of SII-produced COVID-19 vaccine doses are due to the increased demand for COVID-19 vaccines in India.

We know that in this early phase of COVID-19 vaccine roll-out, vaccine manufacturers require time to scale and optimize their production processes. We therefore call on your good offices to continuously push policies towards scaling up the production of vaccines as required to meet the objective of supplying initial doses to all participating economies in the first half of the year and further increasing this in the second half of the year as set out within the COVAX framework.

3. Further, we are interested in the ongoing debate at the WTO on a proposal to waive standard WTO rules governing intellectual property rights for COVID-related vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics. We note that many of the supporters of this proposal are developing and least developed countries, whilst critics of the proposed waiver -who say the waiver could threaten investment and innovation - are from developed countries.

The coronavirus pandemic is a global public health emergency that demands extraordinary responses and measures. The waiver of trade related intellectual property rights for COVID19 related vaccines is essential for releasing the global potential for adequate production and distribution of vaccines across many countries in the world including developing countries and providing universal access to the vaccines.

We therefore request your good offices to work with the WTO on this matter to achieve favorable policies and measures towards the effective scale-up of vaccine production and distribution around the world.

Mr Director-General, ITUC-Africa urges your organisation to work with African organisations, governments and stakeholders in the efforts to have flexible and bearable financing arrangements for procuring COVID-19 vaccines. Also, we ask that the WHO Offices in Africa be allotted more resources to enable them assist African countries to reinvest, revamp, expand and upgrade public health care delivery.

We are also writing to express our hope and expectation that the COVAX facility will attain the 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by 2021. This is because daily, our lives are imperiled by the effects of this pandemic. We are eager to defeat this virus and to get back our lives and to work together to build forward better.

As we count on your understanding, please accept the assurances of our highest esteem.

Yours sincerely,



**Kwasi Adu-Amankwah**  
**General Secretary**

\* Note: The ITUC-Africa is a pan-African trade union organisation representing over 17 million working men and women from her 110 affiliated national trade union organisations in 52 of the 54 African countries.