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## **COVID survivors from 37 countries write to pharmaceutical bosses to demand a People's Vaccine**

Survivors of COVID-19 from 37 countries are among almost 1,000 people who have signed an open letter to pharmaceutical industry leaders calling for a 'people's vaccine' and treatments that are available to all – free from patents. The letter comes on the eve of a high-level side event about the pandemic at the UN General Assembly in New York tomorrow (30 September).

The signatories include 242 COVID-19 survivors from South Africa to Finland and New Zealand to Brazil. They also include 190 people in 46 countries who have lost relatives to the virus, and 572 signatories with underlying health conditions that mean they are more likely to develop severe forms of COVID-19 and have a greater risk of dying from it.

The letter says: "Some of us have lost loved ones to this killer disease. Some of us have come close to death ourselves. Some of us are continuing to live in fear that contracting this disease would be fatal for us. We see no justification why your profit or monopolies should mean anyone else should go through this."

It describes pharmaceutical corporations as "carrying on with business as usual - defending monopolies while refusing to share research and know-how" and calls on industry leaders to "ensure COVID-19 vaccines and treatments reach everyone who needs them by preventing monopolies, ramping up production and sharing knowledge."

Pharmaceutical monopolies will restrict the production of effective vaccines and treatments to a small number of manufacturers, preventing the mass production that is needed to meet global demand. The letter demands that corporations immediately license vaccine technology and intellectual property rights to the WHO COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP).

One of the signatories, Dilafruz Gafurova, 43, from Tajikistan, said: "Me and my husband got sick with this disease. We could only rely on ourselves as hospitals were full ... It was really difficult to get the right medicines. I am a mother of four children ... I was afraid to leave them alone in this world if something bad could happen with me ... The reason I am signing this letter is to help others to get [a] vaccine. Not all the people around the world can get this vaccine, as they simply cannot afford it. They hardly [have enough to meet] their daily needs."

The letter was organised by the People's Vaccine Alliance, a global coalition of organisations and activists united under a common aim of campaigning for a people's vaccine for COVID-19 that is based on shared knowledge and is freely available to everyone everywhere.

Tomorrow at the UN General Assembly, Bill Gates and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson will be among other high-profile figures discussing vaccine access. So far rich nations have failed to exert pressure on pharmaceutical corporations to share technology to maximise the supply of successful vaccines and treatments worldwide.

Heidi Chow from Global Justice Now, a member of the People's Vaccine Alliance said: "Pharmaceutical companies need to pay attention to the demands of people from around the world who have experienced the fear and devastation of COVID-19. The industry cannot block its ears to these voices but should respond immediately by ending their monopolies

and commit to sharing manufacturing know-how. These actions are crucial to expand vaccine supplies so that all countries can affordably access effective vaccines.”

Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of UNAIDS, said: "With AIDS we saw that when treatments were found the wealthier people in wealthier countries got back to health, while millions of people in developing countries were left to die. We must not repeat the same mistake when a vaccine for COVID-19 is found. The right to health is a human right—it should not depend on the money in your pocket or the colour of your skin to be vaccinated against this deadly virus. A vaccine should be a global public good and free of charge for all."

The Alliance is also calling on governments to make public funding for research and development of COVID-19 diagnostics, vaccines and treatments conditional on pharmaceutical companies sharing their knowledge and technology free from patents. When an effective vaccine is available, the Alliance demands that doses are fairly distributed with priority given to health workers and other at-risk groups in all countries.

Ends

#### **Notes to editors:**

Read the full text of the letter here:

[https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/resources/pv\\_alliance\\_open\\_letter\\_fin\\_al.pdf](https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/resources/pv_alliance_open_letter_fin_al.pdf)

To arrange an interview with a spokesperson for the People’s Vaccine Alliance or a COVID-19 survivor, contact [insert contact details]

The high-level side events, titled *Accelerating the end of the COVID-19 pandemic: taking new solutions to scale and making them equitably accessible, to save lives, protect health systems and restart the global economy*, will take place on 30 September at the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in New York. Among the participants are the UN Secretary General, WHO Director General, leaders of a range of countries including the UK and South Africa and UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima.

The open letter has been signed by 941 people. They include 242 COVID-19 survivors from the following 37 countries: Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of North Macedonia, Russia, Senegal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tajikistan, Uganda, UK, USA and Zambia. Some people fell into more than one category and a list of the signatories is available on request. The letter has been sent to the pharmaceutical companies behind the 11 vaccine candidates that are currently in Phase 3 trials.

People’s Vaccine Alliance is a coalition of organisations and activists united under a common aim of campaigning for a ‘people’s vaccine’ for COVID-19 that is based on shared knowledge and is freely available to everyone everywhere. A global common good. It is coordinated by Oxfam and UNAIDS and its members include Frontline AIDS, Global Justice Now, Nizami Ganjavi International Center, STOPAIDS, Wemos and the Yunus Centre. More than 140 world leaders, former leaders and economists have called on governments to unite behind a people’s vaccine against COVID-19.

[https://oxfamapps.org/media/press\\_release/world-leaders-former-leaders-and-economists-unite-in-call-for-a-peoples-vaccine-against-covid-19/](https://oxfamapps.org/media/press_release/world-leaders-former-leaders-and-economists-unite-in-call-for-a-peoples-vaccine-against-covid-19/)

Earlier this month, an analysis by Oxfam revealed that a small group of wealthy nations representing just 13 percent of the world's population have already bought up more than half (51 percent) of the future doses of leading COVID-19 vaccine candidates.

[https://oxfamapps.org/media/press\\_release/small-group-of-rich-nations-have-bought-up-more-than-half-the-future-supply-of-leading-covid-19-vaccine-contenders/](https://oxfamapps.org/media/press_release/small-group-of-rich-nations-have-bought-up-more-than-half-the-future-supply-of-leading-covid-19-vaccine-contenders/)