



January 22, 2021

Dr. Elizabeth Cameron
Senior Director for Global Health Security and Biodefense
National Security Council
White House

Re: Amnesty International's Global Health and Human Rights Priorities

Dear Dr. Cameron:

On behalf of Amnesty International ("Amnesty") and our 10 million members, activists, and supporters worldwide, we [commend](#) President Biden's executive actions to cease U.S. withdrawal from the World Health Organization ("WHO") and to join the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator ("ACT") and the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility. While we welcome these executive actions, we urge President Biden to rescind the Trump Executive Order 13962 (Dec. 8, 2020) prioritizing shipment of the coronavirus vaccine to the U.S. population over other countries.

In December 2020, Amnesty published a report titled [A FAIR SHOT: Ensuring Universal Access to COVID-19 Diagnostics, Treatments, and Vaccines](#). The report sets forth recommendations concerning the COVAX pillar, WHO Fair Allocation Framework, COVAX facility, intellectual property rights, World Trade Organization, and COVID-19 Technology Access Pool ("C-TAP"). In addition, [here](#) is my January 2021 article published on InterAction, laying out *An International Human Rights Framework to COVID-19: Why We Must Prioritize Vaccine Distribution for Those Most at Risk*.

Amnesty urges the Biden administration to implement the following recommendations to ensure that the U.S. government's response to the pandemic respects human rights:

1. [**Rescind the baseless March 2020 CDC order, unsupported by science, that has resulted in over 200,000 expulsions of asylum seekers from the U.S.**](#)

In March 2020, under the guise of public health concerns presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration issued a new policy via the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC"), which provides for automatic expulsions of asylum seekers and accompanied children, in violation of the U.S. government's obligations not to deport people seeking safety to places they may face grave harm. While a court has halted the expulsions of unaccompanied children, expulsions of others—including families and other asylum-seekers—continue.

The CDC's Division of Migration and Quarantine, led by Dr. Martin Cetron, had refused to comply with the Trump administration directive, stating there was no valid public health reason to issue it. Former Vice-President Pence then directed CDC director Dr. Robert Redfield to use the agency's emergency powers to seal the U.S. borders, overruling the CDC scientists who found there was no evidence the order would slow the spread of COVID-19.

Consistent with President Biden's commitment to be guided by science, the administration should immediately rescind the [March 2020 order](#) authorizing mass expulsions at the border.

2. Support and fund global initiatives to ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 health products

The U.S. government has already ordered more than 20 percent of the [world's supplies of vaccines](#), enough to immunize the entire U.S. population [four times over](#). Meanwhile, [70 lower income countries](#) may only be able to vaccinate 10 percent of their populace against COVID-19 in 2021 unless governments and the pharmaceutical industry take urgent action to produce enough doses.

The international community cannot tackle the pandemic if lower income countries are denied [access to vaccines](#) because they cannot afford the number of doses higher income countries have secured. Through ACT and COVAX, the Biden administration should work with the international community to ensure that [distribution of COVID-19 vaccines](#) is equitable in all regions of the world regardless of countries' income levels.

The administration should also assess intellectual property laws, policies, and practices to ensure that these are not a barrier to the availability and affordability of COVID-19 medical products for all people worldwide. To that end, the U.S. should join the WHO's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool ("C-TAP"), a voluntary sharing platform created to foster greater collaboration around intellectual property rights, thereby increasing availability and affordability of COVID-19 diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines. The U.S. government should respect the spirit of the Doha Declaration on The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights ("TRIPS") and Public Health and support the proposed World Trade Organization TRIPS waiver for COVID-19 related health products.

In addition, the U.S. government should refrain from making bilateral agreements that may affect [the global supply of a vaccine](#). Any public funding to companies should be conditional on terms and conditions being publicly disclosed, in line with principles of transparency and accountability.

3. Support debt cancellation and Special Drawing Rights for lower income countries

The economic fallout of COVID-19 has been particularly devastating for lower income countries. The 77 countries with lowest income need urgent support from the U.S. as they strive to respond to COVID-19. In April 2020, G20 countries agreed to an eight-month repayment suspension for 76 of the world's lowest income countries, which was later extended through April 2021.

As the [top bilateral lender to lower income countries](#), the U.S. should [call on the G20](#) to cancel the debt owed by the world's lowest income countries through the end of 2022, thereby freeing up resources for countries to respond to the pandemic. Additionally, the U.S. government should support IMF issuance of Special Drawing Rights for economic and health mitigation efforts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Increase support to refugees and displaced peoples worldwide

As vaccines are rolled out, governments must proactively include refugees, migrants, and displaced people in vaccination plans. The U.S. government should provide support to host countries to ensure refugees can enroll in national health insurance schemes. The U.S. government should work with the international community to ensure that all displaced persons have access to timely and accurate information and healthcare in the host nation's public health systems. This should include people at the U.S.-Mexico border who have been expelled or turned back due to the March 2020 CDC order and U.S. border control and anti-asylum policies.

The U.S. government should also increase financial support to [international organizations](#) working on the front lines to [address the needs of refugees](#), migrants, and displaced persons, including ensuring that refugee camps and host countries have clean running water, adequate medical personnel, personal protective equipment, and supplies for testing, treatment, preventative measures, and vaccinations to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Through unilateral and international efforts, the U.S. government should address the need for additional shelter for refugees, migrants, and displaced persons in order to reduce density and allow for social distancing. The U.S. government should help organizations build capacity to rapidly respond to the impacts of the pandemic on their operations if infection rates speed up, by ensuring the ability to provide additional staff, isolation units, and treatment facilities. Finally, the U.S. government should support programs to address increased levels of [gender-based violence](#).

Amnesty looks forward to working with you and the NSC team on eradicating the pandemic worldwide, in a manner that respects human rights. Our experts stand ready to provide briefings on any issues outlined above. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 202/281-0017 and jlin@aiusa.org.

Sincerely,



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