

## Equitable Global Access to Covid-19 Vaccinations

BMS World Mission, the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Baptist Union of Wales and the Baptist Union of Scotland, together with the 241 member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance affirm that *“in Jesus Christ all people are equal. We oppose all forms of racism, inequality and injustice and so will do all in our power to address and confront these sins.”*<sup>1</sup>

We acknowledge the solidarity shared by millions of Baptists and non-Baptists alike in the face of the suffering caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. As we move into 2021, we also recognise our responsibility to participate in the solution to this crisis. We will do so by:

- calling for the co-operation of governments to support co-ordinated mass vaccination systems and enhance access to vaccinations through aid and economic innovations.
- urging Baptists, both in the UK and worldwide to participate in enabling global vaccination.
- repudiating unhelpful narratives associated with mass vaccination and asking Baptists and all people of goodwill to do so as well.
- issuing a clarion call for just access to Covid-19 vaccines globally – including five specific steps of justice necessary for equitable global access – and a shared solidarity in addressing this pandemic.

### Covid-19 has exposed inequality

Inequality has been exposed in a multitude of ways during the Covid-19 pandemic. We have seen the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) countries struggle to address comprehensive testing and treatment of the virus, artificially masking its impact in many places.<sup>2</sup> Stigma, failure to address other existing health concerns and economic regression have followed. The pandemic has also shone a light on the discrepancies that exist between different sectors of society within member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The fault lines and their effects are well known: disproportionate impact in vulnerable ethnic and racial communities, disposable employment, loneliness, lack of space to ensure mental wellbeing and widened gaps in financial disparities, difficulties in accessing and attaining education, and the challenges that come with poor access to secure internet connection.

As disciples of Jesus, we anticipate his Kingdom of peace and justice, and respond to our collective biblical mandate to confront all forms of human inequality. Our solemn plea is that the global vaccination plan would be a near-unprecedented model for global human equality.

### Four points prevail

*“Covid-19 anywhere is Covid-19 everywhere.”*<sup>3</sup> It is our conviction that in order to defeat Covid-19, we must defeat it everywhere and defeat it simultaneously. No human being should experience the prevailing rules of poverty and exclusion in this regard. We do not wish to add Covid-19 vaccinations to the list of injections that children in the global community fail to receive for generations to come. Instead, given its virility, Covid-19 should be treated like smallpox: decisively and fundamentally eradicated. To defeat Covid-19, we must defeat it everywhere and do so quickly.

**The slower the global rollout of the vaccine, the more lives will be lost.** Even in countries with excellent health systems, Covid-19 is still regularly claiming the lives of more than two per cent of all reported as infected.<sup>4</sup> We know this will continue to cripple families, businesses and societies around the world. No-one should be

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the “BWA Centenary Congress Belief Statement: Point 17,” Baptist World Alliance, Adopted July 2005, accessed at [www.baptistworld.org/beliefs](http://www.baptistworld.org/beliefs).

<sup>2</sup> “Our World in Data,” Global Change Data Lab, accessed in January 2021 at <https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus-testing>.

<sup>3</sup> Melinda Gates, “Gates Foundation Announces New Funds to Develop COVID-19 Vaccines and Increase Access to Affordable Vaccines in Low-Income Countries,” Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, accessed in January 2021 at [www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2020/11/Gates-Foundation-announces-new-funds-to-develop-COVID-19-vaccines](http://www.gatesfoundation.org/Media-Center/Press-Releases/2020/11/Gates-Foundation-announces-new-funds-to-develop-COVID-19-vaccines).

<sup>4</sup> Based on data publicly provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, and the United States’ Centers for Disease Control and Protection (CDC).

stopped from accessing treatments or vaccines because of their race, where they live, what they can afford, or their convictions of faith and conscience.

We acknowledge that healthy populations are productive. **Globally interconnected supply chains and markets will be more successful when an integrated and universal approach to vaccination is upheld as a priority.** It will save lives as well as jobs, stimulating more rapid economic recovery around the world.

While intellectual property laws provide corporate protection for pharmaceutical companies from incurring losses during the research and development phase, we believe that the pandemic represents 'business unusual'. **The economic shock threatening to plunge up to 100 million people back into extreme poverty<sup>5</sup> and which led to nearly ten per cent loss of GDP across all OECD countries<sup>6</sup> must be halted,** even if it requires creative short-term legislation and an expansion of aid spending by the world's wealthiest countries.

### Five justice steps

**We call on governments in OECD countries to enhance aid budgets** to fight the pandemic globally, respond to its humanitarian impacts and support recovery. As poverty increases due to economic recession in most global economies, governments must maintain and increase international development co-operation budgets rather than restrict them in the face of domestic fiscal pressures.

**We call for strong international co-operation and condemn "vaccine nationalism."** Specifically, we call on government and private sector actors to support worldwide collective efforts to eradicate the pandemic and produce vaccines for all on a fair and equitable basis. This should include support for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovation (CEPI), funding research and development into vaccine candidates and the Gavi COVAX instrument for global vaccination.<sup>7</sup> This is the best way in which global vaccination can avoid becoming a tool for political, economic, and diplomatic leverage.

**We call on faith leaders and governments to recognise the important role faith communities can play as civil society enablers,** capable of mobilising people for vaccination and hosting vaccination hubs in their buildings and community gatherings. As many unhelpful myths abound regarding Covid-19's various vaccines, trusted faith leaders are also capable of dissuading these destructive narratives and building co-operation with national vaccination programs.

**We call on manufacturers to commit supplies to poorer nations and to supply vaccines at cost,** at least until the pandemic is over, and urge employees, investors and other stakeholders in the pharmaceutical industry to lobby for this commitment.<sup>8</sup>

**We call for collective support for research in preventing future pandemics and for research into limiting the knock-on adverse effects of the virus on an array of services in low and middle-income countries.** This would include, for example, children who have been forced into child labour due to schools being closed returning to education.

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<sup>5</sup> "UN / DESA Policy Brief #86: The Long-Term Impact of COVID-19 on Poverty," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed in January 2021 at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-86-the-long-term-impact-of-covid-19-on-poverty/>.

<sup>6</sup> "News Release: OECD GDP Growth, Quarterly National Account," Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), accessed in January 2021 at <https://www.oecd.org/sdd/na/GDP-Growth-Q220.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Established in part, by the World Health Organisation (WHO), COVAX aims to ensure access to equitable distribution of COVID-19 tests, treatment and vaccines into 92 low and middle income countries.

<sup>8</sup> COVAX already has promised to supply vaccines at \$3 per dose. Notably the Oxford Astrozeneca vaccine was produced with this cost profile and global distribution in mind.

Together, we stand both in prayerful lament for all who have died and been negatively impacted, and in hopeful expectation that in the face of this pandemic the world will choose to pursue equity and justice, especially for the most vulnerable.