

Thank you, Chair. It is my pleasure to be here before the committee.

Oxfam supports long-term development, advocacy, and emergency response programs in more than 90 countries around the world.

The low-, and lower-middle income countries we work in have suffered tremendously from the pandemic.

COVID-19 has shattered the world's weakest economies, destroying livelihoods and making global hunger skyrocket. In 2021, 163 million people were pushed into poverty because of the pandemic. These same countries have struggled to access vaccines. In 2021, more than 80% of all vaccines went to G20 countries, while less than 1% reached low-income countries. Vaccine inequality has prolonged the pandemic and poorer countries have paid the price of vaccine inequality in economic terms, and in lives. For every life lost to COVID-19 in a rich country, four were lost in low and lower-middle income countries. Globally, 4.7 million children have lost a parent or caregiver to the virus - a staggering four children every minute.

COVAX was supposed to deliver two billion doses to low and middle-income nations by the end of 2021, but achieved less than half of that goal because of slow donations from wealthy countries - including Canada - and delivery delays from vaccine makers. People in low-and middle-income countries should not have to rely on the charitable goodwill of rich nations and pharmaceutical corporations to fulfil their right to protection from COVID-19.

This is why Oxfam has supported the calls for a TRIPS waiver. The TRIPS waiver proposal, put forth by India and South Africa in October 2020 and backed by over 100 nations, was a powerful message from developing countries that they needed relief in this pandemic. By giving more companies the legal ability to reproduce COVID-19 vaccines and drugs, a waiver could help to increase supplies and pave the way for a more equitable distribution of life-saving technologies. For 18 months, the European Union and other rich countries chose to block the TRIPS waiver and the path to an early exit from this pandemic – defending the interests of pharmaceutical monopolies.

Large pharmaceutical companies have been the biggest winners in this pandemic. It is tragic that our global economy has proven better at creating new vaccine billionaires than at vaccinating the billions of people who need protection from this cruel disease.

A few weeks ago, a document was published proposing a compromise agreement on the TRIPS waiver - negotiated by the US, the EU, South Africa and India. With exception to the EU, these countries have not officially endorsed the compromise proposal. It is positive that the EU has finally come to the table and acknowledged that intellectual property rules and pharmaceutical monopolies are a barrier to vaccinating the world. However, in our view, the document is only a very small step forward. The current text is narrow in scope and has considerable limitations:

- It does not cover COVID tests or treatments.

- It only covers patents and not other intellectual property barriers
- Its narrow geographical scope excludes countries with significant manufacturing capacity.
- It creates new onerous barriers for countries seeking to issue a compulsory license rather than ease current rules.

Adopting this text without addressing its flaws would set a negative precedent and stand in the way of the world's ability to respond collectively to future pandemics. We hope that Canada will work collaboratively at the World Trade Organization to urgently remedy the limitations in the proposed text.

We would also like to see Canada accelerate its delivery of surplus doses, and scale up international assistance funding to support developing countries with the devastating economic fallout from the pandemic. COVID-19's economic, social, educational and health impacts on women and girls have been particularly staggering. In 24 months, the pandemic has set back the goal of achieving gender parity by a whole generation.

COVID-19 is a transnational challenge but our collective response so far has been shortsighted, inequitable, and nationalistic. It is time to change course. The world has waited long enough.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear here today, on behalf of Oxfam