
28 September 2020

OPEN LETTER TO HEADS OF STATE

Global business, workers and civil society are united in calling for all governments to scale-up their political and financial commitment to the Access to COVID Tools Accelerator as a critical way for the world to quickly end the acute phase of the coronavirus pandemic.

Your Excellencies,

We are writing to you on behalf of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the institutional representative of over 45 million businesses, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the global voice of the world's working people, and Global Citizen, a movement of engaged citizens who use their collective voice to end extreme poverty by 2030.

The world is at a critical moment in the Covid-19 pandemic. At last count, over 30 million cases have been recorded, nearly one million people have died, and 90% of healthcare systems have been disrupted. The economic disruption has been enormous, with the global economy expected to contract by US\$7 trillion in 2020, compromising the livelihoods of millions and threatening our attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

At the same time, significant medical advances that could bring an end to the acute phase of the pandemic present grounds for cautious optimism. More than 200 vaccine candidates are being developed and it is likely that at least one will successfully complete phase III trials and receive approval by the end of the year. Several repurposed and new treatments are now regularly used to treat Covid-19 patients. And every day new testing methods are being developed as governments adopt more sophisticated testing strategies.

While further research and development is still needed to discover as well as ensure the safety and effectiveness of new COVID-19 tools, every effort must be made to rapidly and drastically scale-up and roll out the new therapeutics, diagnostics and vaccines as they are discovered, on a global and equitable basis. After all, businesses, workers and citizens will only be able to thrive once severe disease is controlled and positive economic conditions return in all countries. And no country will be able to return to any sense of normality so long as the virus threatens health, economic and social systems in foreign lands. In short, the world now needs a model of international cooperation as novel as the virus itself.

Thankfully, such a model already exists—the “Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator” (ACT-A)—the unprecedented collaboration between intergovernmental organisations, industry and civil society that would ensure the equitable access to, and allocation of, the most critical health tools to fight Covid-19: vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics. Having seen ACT-A's impressive work over the past four months, we are convinced that massively scaling-up ACT-A would make a significant difference in our collective fight against Covid-19—but only if governments give it the proper political and financial commitment.

While we appreciate the leadership many governments have shown in pledging their early support for ACT-A, governments must match their enthusiasm with the funds necessary to realise ACT-A's mission. At this new stage in the pandemic, all countries must affirm their political support for ACT-A, make good on prior financial commitments, and further commit to fill the US\$35 billion funding gap—US\$15 billion of which is needed urgently by the end of 2020—to achieve critical objectives through 2021.

The moral case for ACT-A participation is undeniable, but there is also a cast iron economic case for government investment in ACT-A. The financial investment required to fully fund the initiative is miniscule compared to the potential losses from further lockdowns, social distancing policies and fiscal stimulus measures that a prolonged pandemic would require. To put the US\$35 billion price tag in perspective, one need only note that this would be fully paid back in 36 hours once international mobility and trade is restored. Total funding would represent less than a third of 1% of the US\$11 trillion that G20 governments have already spent on domestic economic stimulus packages. What's more, for every day that Covid-19 continues to ravage the global economy, more businesses will close, more jobs will be lost and more citizens will fall into financial hardship, unable to provide for their families.

Beyond supporting ACT-A, governments should also publicly pledge to avoid enacting trade barriers—such as export restrictions—that would limit foreign access to medical equipment, medicines and vaccines. The clear health, economic and political damage done by countries enacting export barriers on personal protective equipment, food and medicines in the early days of the pandemic would pale in comparison to equivalent approaches being taken in respect of vaccines. The last thing the world needs right now would be a mad scramble between nations for doses of proven vaccines, which could trigger a far-reaching escalation of trade restrictions with potentially devastating consequences.

The United Nations General Assembly high level event on ACT-A on 30 September will be an important moment for global leaders to commit financial and political support to the ACT-A vision. Thereafter, leaders of G20 countries, in particular, have an opportunity at the November Leaders' Summit to fully fund ACT-A and to refrain from enacting trade barriers on vaccines and related products. Not only would this speed-up the end of the Covid-19 pandemic—it would also make good the G20 Leaders' Commitment of 26 March 2020 and demonstrate responsiveness to the demands of business, workers and citizens for more meaningful international cooperation.

Now is the time for all leaders to honour and realise our shared commitment to leave no-one behind in this crisis. Right now, we consider that a critical way of achieving that is by working to ensure that all countries and populations have early, affordable and equitable access to the new vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics made possible by ACT-A.

Yours sincerely,



John W.H. Denton AO
Secretary General
ICC



Sharan Burrow
General Secretary
ITUC



Hugh Evans
CEO
Global Citizen