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ACTU calls on Government to save lives and support a waiver on vaccine patents

Australia is just one of 12 countries stopping a waiver on patents for COVID-19 products which would allow developing countries to manufacture COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. The ACTU calls on the Federal Government to change their position at tomorrow's meeting of the WTO Trade Related-Aspects Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Council.

At the current rate developing countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa will not receive required vaccinations until 2023 or later, and a temporary waiver would enable them to ramp up production of vaccines, PPE and lifesaving tech such as respirators.

By stalling negotiations and refusing to support a waiver, the Federal Government is siding with big pharmaceutical companies who are protecting their exclusive patents and huge profits during a global pandemic.

A waiver would save lives and ensure that we emerge from the pandemic sooner.

Experts believe the world has less than a year before mutations render the majority of first-generation vaccines ineffective – there is no time to waste.

Almost 12,000 people signed a petition run by the ACTU and Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA calling on the Australian Government to support the waiver. The petition was handed over at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Sydney today.

<https://www.megaphone.org.au/petitions/trips-waiver>

Quotes attributable to ACTU President Michele O'Neil:

“The Morrison Government is currently siding with big pharma who are profiteering during a global pandemic – it is imperative that they support the effort to end the pandemic as soon as possible and support India and South Africa's waiver proposal at the TRIPS Council meeting.

“Australia is one of only 12 countries blocking the waiver. More than 120 countries including the USA, New Zealand, China, and Russia support a patent waiver. The Morrison Government is being caught on the wrong side of history.

“Not only has the Morrison Government bungled the vaccine roll out in Australia, but by blocking the waiver on intellectual property rights on COVID vaccines at the WTO, they are stopping the fast and effective roll out of vaccines in developing countries around the world.

“Most developing countries cannot expect to vaccinate their people until 2023 or later – if this continues we can expect thousands more deaths, a longer pandemic and more mutations.

“This waiver will save lives and ensure that we emerge from the grips of the pandemic sooner”.

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