

Tuesday 14 September 2021

## COVID-19 vaccines: community groups urge Trade Minister to deliver on waiving monopolies at WTO

Following months of campaigning, Australian civil society organisations last week welcomed the comments from Trade Minister Dan Tehan that the Australian Government now supports the temporary waiver of monopoly rules on COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and related products proposed by India and South Africa at the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The waiver is key to supporting equitable and affordable access to vaccines for developing countries and has the potential to save millions of lives.

The Australian Government must now put words into action by working with other supportive countries to promote the passage of the waiver at the WTO TRIPS Council meeting today.

The waiver is needed urgently because WTO rules give pharmaceutical companies 20-year monopolies, meaning the supply and price of vaccines is controlled by a few companies who have already made billions from vaccines largely developed with public funds. Australia has felt the impact of these monopolies too, with both Pfizer and Moderna refusing to share intellectual property to allow local production in Australia. If pharmaceutical companies continue to control vaccine access, millions more will die and more dangerous virus variants like Delta will develop.

The waiver was first proposed in October 2020 to enable increased manufacturing of affordable COVID-19 vaccines in countries like India and South Africa that already produce generic medicines. Since then, support for the waiver has grown, with Australia just one of a handful of countries not in support.

There is widespread support in the Australian community for the waiver. More than 50,000 Australians signed petitions in support, and an Essential Media poll found 62 per cent support for the waiver across Coalition, Labor and Greens voters.

We call on Minister Tehan to make a formal public statement of Australia's support of the waiver and actively promote the waiver proposal to the few countries which are still blocking it.

### **Media contact:**

ACTU Media Isabella Tilley on 0414 894 040 or 03 9664 7315

Public Health Association of Australia, Associate Professor Deborah Gleeson 0423 209 029

Amnesty International, Media Danielle Veldre 0408 972 997

Union Aid Abroad-APHEDA, Executive Officer, Kate Lee 0420 293 083

Oxfam Australia CEO Lyn Morgain, Media Lily Partland 0418 118 687

Friends of the Earth, Economic Justice Program, Sam Cossar-Gilbert 0413 496 570

Dr Patricia Ranald AFTINET Convener 0419 695 841



Union Aid Abroad APHEDA  
The global justice organisation of the Australian union movement



MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST. COLUMBAN