



*December 1, 2021*

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Ms Winnie Byanyima,

On this World AIDS Day we recognise the 40 years that have shaped life for many. We honour those whose lives have been cut short and reaffirm our commitment to a scientific community that has worked tirelessly against this disease. My mother would be deeply grateful for everything you stand for and have accomplished. We all share that gratitude, so thank you.

It is striking to now see the world's leading AIDS activists are also leading the call for COVID-19 vaccine equity. Vaccinating the world is a test of our moral character and we are experiencing a spectacular failure when it comes to global vaccine equity. Similar to the AIDS crisis, we've yet again revealed over the past year, that the value of life depends on whether you were born and/or live in a rich nation, or a developing country.

We've known for some time (thanks to medical experts) that if we are unable to meet agreed targets to vaccinate 40% of every country's population by the end of the year, and 70% by next September, potentially more dangerous COVID-19 variants are likely to arise. Yet, here we are.

While it's too early to know the full extent of the risk that the Omicron variant poses, which we only know about thanks to the experts in Southern Africa identifying it, there is no doubt that its emergence is of deep concern. Now more than ever, the voiceless majority of the world needs to be heard, and the onus is on our leaders to end this pandemic. Anything less is self-defeating.

That means breaking pharma monopolies that prevent vaccines from getting to communities around the world in need; that means Governments honoring their promises and delivering the doses that they committed; that means pursuing international pandemic agreements with strict timelines and holding each other accountable to them; that means treating all human lives as equal lives.

It's time to draw from the lessons we learned throughout the HIV/AIDS pandemic, where millions died unnecessarily due to deep inequities in access to treatment. Are we really comfortable repeating the failures of the past? Everything I've learnt, from the youth of Sentebale, tells me not. They see how repeating these mistakes is destructive and self-defeating, it is a betrayal of the next generation.

Let's spend today celebrating and building on the work of champions who turned what was once a death sentence into a manageable condition. Let's spend tomorrow continuing our efforts to save lives and make a difference.

Prince Harry, The Duke of Sussex  
Founding Patron, Sentebale