Today marks three years since the World Health Organization (WHO) first characterised COVID-19 as a pandemic. In that time, we have seen extraordinary feats of scientific innovation and an enormous mobilisation of public resources to develop effective vaccines, tests, and treatments. But we have also seen a global response held back by profiteering and nationalism.

We are hopeful that an end to the acute stage of the COVID-19 pandemic may be in sight. Thus, the world is at a critical juncture. Decisions made now will determine how the world prepares for and responds to future global health crises. World leaders must reflect on mistakes made in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic so that they are never repeated.

There are decades of publicly funded research behind COVID-19 vaccines, treatments, and tests. Governments have poured taxpayer money by the billions into research, development, and advance orders, reducing the risks for pharmaceutical companies. These are the people's vaccines, the people's tests, and the people's treatments.

Yet, a handful of pharmaceutical companies has been allowed to exploit these public goods to fuel extraordinary profits, increasing prices in the Global North while refusing to share technology and knowledge with capable researchers and producers in the Global South.

Instead of rolling out vaccines, tests, and treatments based on need, pharmaceutical companies maximized their profits by selling doses first to the richest countries with the deepest pockets. Billions of people in low and middle-income countries, including frontline workers and the clinically vulnerable, were sent to the back of the line.

Had governments listened to the science and shared vaccines equitably with the world, it is estimated that at least 1.3 million lives could have been saved in the first year of the vaccine rollout alone, or one preventable death every 24 seconds. That those lives were not saved is a scar on the world’s conscience.

Even today, as we enter the fourth year of the COVID-19 pandemic, many developing countries cannot access affordable treatments or tests. And, like so many other disasters, poor women, people of colour, and people in low- and middle-income countries carry the burden.

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3 According to a study published in Nature (Moore et al, 2022), an estimated 1.3 million fewer people would have died if COVID-19 vaccines were distributed equitably in 2021: https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-022-02064-y
main burden of the impact of COVID-19. As UNCTAD has warned, COVID-19 could set back
the fight for gender equality by four decades.4

The tragedy of this pandemic is made all the greater because this inequity was preventable
and the scale of the impacts of COVID-19 could have been greatly reduced. We have been
here before. At the height of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, millions died as expensive, patented
treatments were unaffordable for much of the world.

As the world pauses to remember the lives and livelihoods lost to three years of COVID-19,
we ask world leaders to pledge – “never again.”

Never again will the lives of people in wealthy countries be prioritised over the lives of people
in the Global South. Never again will publicly funded science be locked behind private
monopolies. Never again will a company’s desire to make extraordinary profits come before
the needs of humanity.

Yet we do have the tools needed to plan an equitable response to the next global health
crisis; including by supporting low- and middle-income countries to host research and
development hubs and to manufacture vaccines, tests, and treatments. Commitment from
world leaders now can prevent a repetition of the pain and horror of the COVID-19 and HIV
and AIDS pandemics.

We call on world leaders to take four urgent steps:

1. Support a Pandemic Accord at the WHO that embeds equity and human rights in
   pandemic preparedness and response. To do so, it must commit governments to
   waive relevant intellectual property rules automatically and ensure the sharing of
   medical technology and knowledge when a Public Health Emergency of International
   Concern is declared.

2. Invest in scientific innovation and manufacturing capacity in the Global South
   through projects like the mRNA Technology Transfer Hub established by WHO and
   partners. Governments, companies, and international institutions should provide
   political, financial, and technical support to these initiatives to maximise production
   and supply for all.

3. Invest in global common goods. Public funding delivered miracles in the COVID-19
   pandemic. But publicly financed medical innovations should be used to maximise the
   public benefit, not private profits. They should not be locked behind patents. All
   governments should invest more in public research and development, and place strict
   requirements for publicly funded medical technologies developing from that
   investment to be affordable and accessible to everyone, everywhere.

4. Remove the intellectual property barriers that prevent knowledge and
technology sharing. Governments at the World Trade Organization (WTO) took too
long and did too little to address this barrier for COVID-19 vaccines. WTO members
should move to approve an intellectual property waiver for COVID-19-related vaccines

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and extend that decision to cover COVID-19 tests and treatments. That would dramatically improve access to all these lifesaving products. Developing countries should exercise their rights to use the full flexibilities of the TRIPS agreement to protect public health.

These actions should be a priority for the G20 and G7, at this historic moment for Global South leadership with the G20 Presidency passing from Indonesia to India, and then to Brazil and South Africa.

With these actions, world leaders can begin to fix the structural problems in global health that have held back the response to COVID-19, HIV and AIDS, and other diseases. It is time to embed justice, equity, and human rights in pandemic preparedness and response. Only then can we truly turn the page on this chapter of history and say, “never again.”

Signed,

H.E. José Manuel Ramos-Horta - President of Timor Leste¹
Quarraisha Abdool Karim - Associate Scientific Director, CAPRISA
Tahir Amin - Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director, I-MAK
María Elena Agüero - Secretary General, Club de Madrid
Rashid Alimov - Secretary General, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (2016-2019), Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan (1992-1994)²
Abdullaziz Altwaijri - Former Director-General of ISESCO²
Carlos Alvarado Quesada - President of Costa Rica (2018-2022)¹
Kenneth Nana Amoateng - Executive Director, AbibiNsroma Foundation ANF / GCAP Ghana
Eduardo Arathoon - Country Ambassador for GAFFI
Elena Arengo – Co-Executive Director, PODER
John Arnold - Bishop of Salford and Chair of CAFOD
Rosalía Arteaga Serrano - President of Ecuador (1997)²
Haitham Muhammed Ibrahim Awadallah - Acting Federal Minister of Health of Republic of Sudan
Shaukat Aziz - Prime Minister of Pakistan (2004-2007)²
José María Aznar - President of the Government of Spain (1996-2004)¹
Elia Badjo - Executive Director, COSAMED
Jan Peter Balkenende - Prime Minister of The Netherlands (2002-2010)

Saeed Baloch - General Secretary, Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum

Clemente Bautista - International Network Officer, Advocates of Science and Technology for the People

Ban Ki-Moon - Eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations

Joyce Banda - President of the Republic of Malawi (2012-2014)

Linda-Gail Bekker - CEO of the Desmond Tutu Health Foundation

Carol Bellamy - Chair of the Board of the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund and Former Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Mariëlle Bemelmans - Director, Wemos

Valdis Birkavs - Prime Minister of Latvia (1993-1994)

Irina Bokova - Former Director-General of UNESCO, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria. Co-Founder & Member of GWL Voices

Volkan Bozkir - 75th President of the UNGA

Arlene D. Brosas – Assistant Minority Leader, House of Representatives, 19th Congress of the Philippines

John Bruton - Prime Minister of Ireland (1994-1997)

Gabriela Bucher - Executive Director, Oxfam

Mahendranath Busgopaul - Secretary-General, Halley Movement

Winnie Byanyima - Executive Director of UNAIDS and UN Under-Secretary General

Kathy Calvin - Former President and Chief Executive Officer of the United Nations Foundation

Chuckie Calsado - Chairperson, AGHAM Advocates of Science and Technology for the People

Kim Campbell - Prime Minister of Canada (1993)

Fernando Henrique Cardoso - President of Brazil (1995-2003)

Francisca L. Castro - Deputy Minority Leader, House of Representatives, 19th Congress of the Philippines

Sarah Champion, Chair of the UK’s International Development Committee and MP for Rotherham

Laura Chinchilla - President of Costa Rica (2010-2014) and Vice-President of Club de Madrid
Lois Chingandu - Acting Executive Director, Frontline AIDS
Sok Chamreun Choub - Executive Director, KHANA
Helen Clark - Prime Minister of New Zealand (1999-2008) and Co-Chair of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response1
2 3
Sean Cleary - Chairman, Strategic Concepts (Pty) Ltd4
Marie Louise Coleiro Preca - President of Malta (2014-2019)1
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Nick Dearden - Director, Global Justice Now
Rut Diamint, Professor - Universidad Torcuato di Tella4
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Charles Ebikeme - Visiting Fellow, London School of Economics and Political Science
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Diane Elson - Emeritus Professor, University of Essex
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María Fernanda Espinosa - 73rd President of the UN General Assembly, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, Executive Director of GWL Voices2 4
Christiana Figueres - Former Exec Secretary of the UN Convention on Climate Change
Jan Fisher, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic (2009-2010)2
Vicente Fox - President of Mexico (2000-2006)1
Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle - President of Chile (1994-2000)1
Sakiko Fukuda-Parr - Professor of International Affairs at The New School
Chiril Gaburici - Prime Minister of Moldova (2015)2
Cristina Gallach - Former Under Secretary General to the United Nations. Former Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and for Ibero-America and the Caribbean of the Spanish government.³

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Felipe González - President of the Government of Spain (1982-1996)¹

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Dalia Grybauskaitė - President of Lithuania (2009-2019)¹

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Ángel Gurría - Secretary General of the OECD (2006-2021)¹

Alfred Gusenbauer - Chancellor of Austria (2007-2008)¹

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Ameerah Haq - Chair of the Global Board of BRAC and Former UN Under-Secretary-General for Field Support³

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Andrew Hill - Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics, University of Liverpool

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Nomfundo Kwini - Community Arts Network

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Nora Lustig - Director, Commitment to Equity Institute at Tulane University

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Thabo Cecil Makgoba - Archbishop of Cape Town

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Angélica Patiño - Director, Global Humanitarian Progress Corporation ^1
Rosen Plevneliev - President of Bulgaria (2012-2017)
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Álvaro Pop - Global Steering Group of International Decade of Indigenous Languages
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Jorge ‘Tuto’ Quiroga - President of Bolivia (2001-2002)^1
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Asa Rehman - Executive Director, War on Want
Ingo Ritz, Director - Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)
Richard John Roberts - Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine (1993)
José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero - President of the Government of Spain (2004-2011)^1
Petre Roman - Prime Minister of Romania (1989-1991)^1, 2
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Jenny Shipley - Prime Minister of New Zealand (1997-1999)^1
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Darren Walker - 10th President of Ford Foundation
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Patrick Watt - CEO, Christian Aid
Mark Watts - Executive Director, C40 Cities
Stephen Wigley - Chair of Wales Synod Cymru of the Methodist Church
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Viktor Yushchenko - President of Ukraine (2005-2010)
Valdis Zatlers - President of Latvia (2007-2011)

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2 Member Nizami Ganjavi International Center
3 Member Group of Women Leaders (GWL) Voices for Change and Inclusion
4 Member Advisory Committee of Club de Madrid