



Statement from Mr. Thomas Cueni, Director General of IFPMA, in the Panel discussion on ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (March 10th, 2022)

Excellencies,
Chairperson,

The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers & Associations (IFPMA) would like to thank the OHCHR for convening this half-day panel discussion in line with the resolution 46/14.

Being aware of the responsibility our industry has to patients and society, pharma companies large and small, in developing and developed countries have engaged, since the first days of the pandemic, in unprecedented levels of collaboration to find solutions to COVID-19. Industry stepped up, bringing its knowledge and expertise in the discovery and development of novel therapeutics and vaccines and in building manufacturing capacity and distribution networks. And yet, a large part of the eligible population in many African nations remains unvaccinated.

Some aspects of our collective efforts in mounting a response have been successful. We have witnessed the fastest vaccine development ever, in just under a year. Within less than three months of the first vaccine getting emergency use approval by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 31 December 2020, we have seen COVID-19 vaccines reaching people across the world.

A commitment to work together to achieve fair and equitable access was also forged in the early days of the pandemic, with the creation of a unique global public-private partnership, Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, which IFPMA joined as founding partner. The vaccine pillar COVAX has been an important vehicle for vaccine equity, with its first billion vaccine doses delivered end of January. Innovative biopharmaceutical companies have supplied four out of five of these vaccines, and more than 80 per cent of the COVAX vaccines have been supplied by our member companies. In addition to COVAX, over 3 billion doses, have been delivered to low- and lower-middle-income countries through bilateral or regional arrangements. Today, over 12 billion doses of vaccines have been produced – trebling pre-pandemic vaccine capacity – and more than 60 per cent of the world’s population have received at least one dose.



The record speed development and successful scaling up of COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing was a remarkable triumph of science and engineering. We have seen bumps and glitches, vaccine projects in vaccine development and scaling up of manufacturing, including challenges faced due to export restrictions and bans by a number of countries. However, we made it and most public health experts today accept that the challenge is no longer the lack of vaccines, but the need for more vaccinations. Significant number of doses will continue to be delivered to lower-income countries, but at present we see that supply is exceeding absorption capacity in many countries.

But despite these successes, collectively, and this includes the biopharmaceutical industry, we have not managed to meet our ambitions of vaccine equity. The global challenge we now face to guarantee a widespread access to vaccines has turned from one concerning supply constraints to one regarding the ability to quickly administer the vaccines. To turn vaccines into vaccinations, and ensure that vaccines shipped effectively reach populations, attention is urgently needed on concrete measures in recipient countries to support COVID-19 vaccine deployment and uptake.

Manufacturers, governments, international institutions, and other non-governmental organizations must work together and redouble efforts now to support countries as they mobilize to execute national vaccine rollouts and remove barriers to the efficient distribution and administration of vaccine doses, so that they reach those who need them most.

To urgently support this endeavor, innovative biopharmaceutical companies will continue to work with all relevant stakeholders on the following three overarching priorities and supporting activities:

- 1) Step up support for country readiness to roll out COVID-19 vaccine doses
- 2) Contribute to equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccine doses
- 3) Continue to drive innovation

As access to all who need the vaccines remains a fundamental issue that needs urgently addressing; but the focus on how intellectual property contributes to this inequity are misplaced and are not backed up by what has happened over the past two years.

The strength of a robust innovation ecosystem in response to the pandemic has been unprecedented and more than proven its effectiveness: driving innovation, underpinning partnerships, facilitating knowledge-sharing, and voluntary licensing, and technology transfer. The positive from this pandemic is the geographic diversity of vaccine manufacturing agreements that have been formed through voluntary collaborations amongst trusted partners, including via 370 collaborations across all five continents. Big companies with small biotechs, developing manufacturers with established ones. IP incentives are enabling the current R&D to combat variants, ongoing technology transfer and voluntary collaborations.



In addition to the technology transfer agreements in South Africa, put in place in the first days of the pandemic between for example Aspen Pharma and J&J, and Pfizer together with BioVac, new solutions are now being set up in other parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa. For example, BioNTech has announced it will establish its first manufacturing facility in the African Union in mid-2022 and expects to ship the modular production units to Rwanda and Senegal. Moderna has signed an agreement to build a manufacturing plant, with a planned capacity of 500 million doses, in Kenya; and has pledged to invest in R&D on 15 CEPI priority pathogens with aim to develop a 'base' vaccine against each of these pathogens.

Flexibility and voluntary solutions to collaborate have been and should continue to be a fundamental pillar to address future healthcare challenges.

To ensure that no-one is left behind in the race to tackle the pandemic which now enters its third year, the biopharmaceutical industry is fully committed to effective international cooperation focusing on getting vaccines from the tarmac into arms is what's needed now more than ever.