



To: The Prime Minister the Hon Jacinda Ardern MP
CC: Minister for Trade and Export Growth the Hon Damien O'Connor
CC: Minister for Foreign Affairs the Hon Nanaia Mahuta
CC: Minister for Health the Hon Andrew Little
CC: Minister for Covid-19 Response the Hon Chris Hipkins
CC: Minister for Pacific Peoples the Hon Aupito William Sio

**Subject: Pacific Island Country public sector unions calls for support on COVID-19
TRIPS Waiver**

5/3/2021

Honourable Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern,

I write to you on behalf of public sector unions from The Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, The Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. We urge New Zealand / Aotearoa to support the proposal currently on the table at the World Trade Organization (WTO) to waive certain TRIPS¹ obligations for the prevention, treatment, and containment of COVID-19.² The original proposal of India and South Africa is now co-sponsored by 57 countries including The Solomon Islands. The proposal is supported by almost 100 countries including all Pacific Island Countries (PICs) WTO members.

New Zealand's commitment through the GAVI COVAX facility and additional direct assistance for COVID-19 vaccine for PICs is welcomed. New Zealand's lack of support for the TRIPS waiver, however, is counter intuitive to ensure swift and affordable vaccination and treatments are made available for all. So far many of our countries have been fortunate to avoid the worst health impacts of the global pandemic. The economic impact, however, from lockdowns and sustained international border closures has been devastating, especially where economies are reliant on tourism and remittances from migrant workers. We face a serious economic crisis, with growing unemployment and governments embracing harsh austerity policies which erode already stretched public services. As such the timeline for vaccination and the re-opening of international borders is of great consequence. Further we also represent frontline health workers in PICs where chronic shortages of basic consumables and medicines are an ongoing challenge and underfunding of public health systems rife.

There is an urgent need to expand and diversify supply options and engage manufacturers from across the world in ramping up COVID-19 vaccine production. Without the waiver,

¹The WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

² <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/IP/C/W669.pdf>



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pharmaceutical companies will be able to prevent other manufacturers from producing COVID-19 vaccines and medicines, impeding scaling up of production. WTO rules ensure big pharma has a monopoly over the market and can dictate prices even to governments, which will consume public finances required for a healthy recovery.

Through the Doha Declaration on Public Health, governments recognised that flexibilities can be used in cases of serious public health crises. The COVID-19 pandemic represents the most serious public health and economic crisis in our lifetimes and our region will not prosper until we can eradicate the virus. The flexibilities contained in the TRIPS agreement will be insufficient unless all governments agree to the waiver.

The waiver is supported by the [World Health Organization](#), [UN Human Rights Experts](#), [UNITAID](#) and [UNAIDS](#). We urge you to read the concerns they have raised around the current market-based approach to vaccine access.

We strongly urge you to unconditionally support the proposal to waive certain TRIPS obligations for the prevention, treatment, and containment of COVID-19 and to immediately stop obstructing its adoption.

We would be happy to provide any additional information and meet to discuss this important matter further.

Your sincerely,

Ms Mele T. 'Amanaki
Secretary General, Public Service Association, Tonga
Female Chair (Titular), Public Service International, Oceania Subregion

On behalf of Pacific Island Country Affiliates including:

- Cook Islands Workers Association
- Fiji Public Services Association
- Fiji Nursing Association
- Samoa Public Service Association
- Solomon Islands Public Employees Union
- Tonga Nurses Association
- Tonga Public Services Association
- Vanuatu Association of Public Services Employees

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