



26 July 2021

(21-5819)

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General Council

Original: Spanish

**COMMUNICATION BY COLOMBIA, COSTA RICA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, ECUADOR,
PANAMA AND PARAGUAY ON TRADE RESTRICTIONS THAT HAMPER EQUITABLE
ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINES**

The following communication, dated 23 July 2021, is circulated at the request of the delegations of Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay in the context of discussions at the World Trade Organization aimed at facilitating the WTO's response to COVID-19.

At the meeting of the General Council held on 5 and 6 May 2021, delegations made a Joint Statement containing the following actions to be taken into account during these debates.

"Our delegations consider that this Organization can and should play a proactive role in the recovery of international trade during this crisis and in the post-pandemic era. This should be done by, first of all, looking to remove as soon as possible, if not immediately, any trade barrier that prevents access to vaccines against COVID-19. In this regard, we consider it essential that discussions on trade and health at the WTO should address:

1. The immediate or prompt removal of all export restrictions and obstacles related to the supply chain of COVID-19 vaccines and their components.
2. A total commitment to prohibit any future export restrictions on COVID-19 vaccines and their components.
3. The need for Members to urgently lift the export restrictions that prevent them from promptly disposing of vaccines that are beginning to accumulate and far exceed the number required to vaccinate their populations, or worse still, that they already know will not be used because of their populations' preferences.
4. The role of trade facilitation measures in timely access to vaccines and their components, including customs and logistics procedures, as well as transparency with regard to, due notification of and information on those procedures.
5. How to facilitate the movement of health personnel. There is not just a scarcity of goods. There are critical situations around the world because of the lack of skilled staff to participate in this huge health campaign. This is something we can review at the WTO, to support hot spots, as not all crises in territories take place at the same time.
6. Possible harmonization of standards and transparency in procedures for approving and sanctioning vaccines, diagnostics and tests, in the framework of the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade, in order to avoid the emergence of multiple incompatible standards that undermine vaccination and economic recovery efforts, as well as the quality of vaccines.
7. A commitment to transparency. All measures affecting exports of vaccines and their components and other associated goods must be duly notified and there should be appropriate areas in which to discuss them.

8. An inclusive dialogue with multiple actors in order to have a comprehensive view of the problem. This will enable Members to move forward in constructive discussions with the pharmaceutical industry in order to promote more effective licensing schemes, avoid an uptick in prices and ensure equitable access to vaccines.
9. The strengthening of multilateral cooperation and the promotion and effective use of innovative mechanisms such as C-TAP, the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and COVAX.

Given that there are innumerable trade aspects, these ideas complement and reinforce other discussions on health and trade in the Organization, such as the Trade and Health Initiative proposed by the Ottawa Group and other countries, or on the waiver proposed by India, South Africa and other sponsors. They also complement and build on the Director-General's efforts and the series of multi-stakeholder dialogues launched in April 2021, which are an important step towards seeking a better understanding of the challenges faced by different sectors in the search for effective responses and ensuring an increase in the production and equitable distribution of vaccines. But the discussion is even broader. It is important that the countries importing vaccines and components participate in these discussions in a manner that is representative of and consistent with the global dimension of the problem and the differentiated impact it has had in the different regions.

There is much more that can be done by the WTO. Health and trade are multidimensional issues that concern us all. Global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, require us to abandon mercantilist interests and favour collective action. No one will be safe until we are all safe".
