



THE PRIME MINISTER

Oslo, 25 March 2021

Dear Ms Shashikant

Thank you for your email dated 16 February, with a letter attached from civil society organisations from the Global South. We have noted your call to support the proposed waiver from certain provisions of the WTO TRIPS Agreement for the prevention, treatment and containment of COVID-19.

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most serious global health crisis we have experienced in our lifetime. It has placed severe strain on people and livelihoods. It also poses challenges in many policy areas, including in the interface between trade policy and health policy, and the impacts of intellectual property rights (IPRs) on the development, production and distribution of vaccines, diagnostics, treatments, and other health technologies.

Success in combating the pandemic requires a shared commitment and joint efforts. The Norwegian Government is working with international partners to secure financing and increase manufacturing capacity for vaccines, diagnostics and treatments, and to provide equitable access to these products on a global scale. One example of this is the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A), including its vaccine pillar COVAX. Its aim is to achieve the rapid development, scaling-up of production and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, underpinned by efforts to strengthen health systems. The ACT-A Facilitation Council is co-chaired by Norway and South Africa.

In Norway's view, the scope of the proposed TRIPS waiver is broad, and the effects it will have are uncertain. The discussions in the WTO since last October have shed more light on the potential impacts and implications of such a waiver. While we believe the discussion should continue, we remain unconvinced that this waiver will result in increased production capacity within a relevant timeframe. We are also mindful of the fact that IPRs incentivise innovation – both during the COVID-19 pandemic and especially in connection with health crises we may encounter in future.

Ms Sangeeta Shashikant
Third World Network

Norway supports a policy that balances the need for incentives for research and development with the need for flexibility for developing countries – in particular least-developed countries. Thus far, we have not seen convincing evidence for the claim that IPRs pose an obstacle to access to vaccines or other products relevant for COVID-19. Norway will continue to work with its partners to scale up production and secure equitable access through international initiatives.

In our view, expanded use of voluntary licensing and partnership agreements can deliver increased manufacturing capacity. To ensure that COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and treatments become available in low- and middle-income countries as rapidly as possible, Norway supports expanded production and supply capacity, including through technology transfer, fairly priced health technologies, increased transparency and rapid registration and approval for COVID-19 tools. These are guiding principles that require coordinated action by all public and private stakeholders, including the pharmaceutical industry.

In their discussions in the WTO, Members should continue to consider how trade policy can help to solve the COVID-19 crisis and future public health concerns. We will actively contribute to these discussions and support the efforts of Director-General Dr Okonjo-Iweala in finding a way to boost manufacturing capacity while the waiver is still under discussion.

Yours sincerely



Erna Solberg