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April 14, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We look forward to your testimony on the Fiscal Year 2022 budget when you appear before the House Appropriations State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee next month. As you prepare for your appearance before the subcommittee, we wanted to raise to your attention the critical issue of global vaccine access and the central role it plays in defeating the coronavirus pandemic as well as the process of global recovery.

We are deeply concerned that in countries' rush to vaccinate their own citizens we risk leaving millions of people behind and therefore prolonging the pandemic. As of the beginning of April, more than 600 million vaccine doses have been administered, but nearly 80% of those have been in only ten countries. While a handful of countries, including the United States, have procured enough doses to vaccinate their entire public, most countries have not begun any vaccinations and have not been able to access any vaccine. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, current global vaccination rates won't translate to herd immunity for another 4.6 years. As you know, we all will remain vulnerable unless vaccine coverage increases globally, not just in some countries, but in all countries.

United States leadership in the global fight against COVID-19 was late and sorely needed. While COVAX and the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator were specifically designed to address the inequality that we have seen in other global health responses, the United States did not participate under the previous Administration. The United States Congress recognized the importance of a robust global response when it provided \$4 billion for COVAX through GAVI. We appreciate your efforts to leverage the U.S. commitment to COVAX by bringing in additional donors through cohosting the Investment Opportunity Event on April 15th. But much more remains to be urgently done.

In particular, we urge you to consider three pathways to address these inequities at least in the short-term. First, the United States should publicly announce a plan to share excess doses in the near term with countries who have not been able to access the vaccine or through a global mechanism such as COVAX and urge other G7 nations to do likewise. Second, the United States should use every tool at our disposal to address the supply chain constraints that are preventing further scale-up of vaccine production as well as the significant investment required in healthcare workers to carry out these vaccinations. Third, the United States should incentivize pharmaceutical companies, especially ones that benefited from significant U.S. public investment, to enter into production agreements with manufacturers in low and middle income countries. Not only would this have the benefit of increasing supply, but would build future capacity for the next inevitable health challenge. In the longer term, we encourage you to work with other United State government colleagues and the World Trade Organization to support the waiver of vaccine patents in times of international health emergencies.

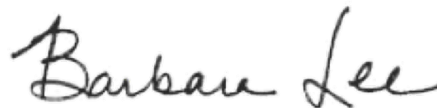
A pandemic underscores how closely we are connected globally. As long as this virus continues to circulate and mutate, new variants will continue to emerge and threaten even vaccinated individuals. Absent global access, many countries will be forced to turn to unproven, and possibly ineffective, vaccines donated by countries such as Russia or China under opaque terms. In particular, populations in Africa and other low-income countries need to be able to, at the minimum, protect their frontline health workers and most vulnerable populations. Nations in the Caribbean, bordering the United States and experiencing a spike in COVID infections, have been appealing for dose sharing and have received little, if any, of their vaccine allocation from COVAX. Given the strong ties and frequent travel between these countries and the United States, they should be prioritized for any excess vaccines we share.

The United States has spearheaded tremendous global health progress, first against polio and childhood diseases, and then against HIV/AIDS. We need to show similar bold and decisive action to fight this pandemic. This will require treating global health as a public good that the entire world benefits from, rather than a privilege of those who can pay for it. We look forward to discussing the Administration's strategy and actions on this critical issue during your appearance before our Subcommittee.

Sincerely,



Rosa DeLauro
Chair
House Appropriations Committee



Barbara Lee
Chairwoman
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on State, Foreign Operations, and
Related Programs

Cc: Gayle Smith, Coordinator for Global COVID Response and Health Security.