

# Seizing the Moment:

## Global Action to End the COVID-19 Crisis and Prevent the Next Pandemic

### Joint Declaration by



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The COVID-19 pandemic is not over. The rapid global spread of the omicron variant has transitioned the pandemic to a new phase that requires updating our strategy and priorities in order to ensure a more effective — and equitable — response.

We are at a pivotal moment: progress on the global response has slowed, and we risk further setbacks due to the convergence of multiple global security crises with pandemic fatigue and complacency. Equitable access to vaccines, tests, and treatments enabled by robust financing, governance, and accountability, remains elusive, compromising the health of millions of people, increasing the chances of more deadly variants, and endangering recovery for all people and countries.

But this is also a strategic opportunity for leaders to take urgent and decisive actions and assert that ending the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing for future threats remains critical to the world's security and stability. At this critical inflection point, the world's response to the pandemic must double down, not lessen up. This response should ensure access to immediate resources to control COVID-19 and to address the complex causal, structural, and consequent problems of the pandemic.

The post-Omicron global strategy must evolve, and requires global solidarity, coordination, and commitment to address short- and long-term imperatives. We can and must protect the most vulnerable and expand access to all COVID-19 tools broadly. We can and must prioritize community, country, and regional leadership and decision-making and strengthen the global system for pandemic preparedness and response. We can and must shift from emergency crisis response to a strategy of sustainable pandemic control that strengthens resilient health systems and future preparedness.

These imperatives resounded throughout our jointly convened dialogue, Global Call to Action: End the COVID-19 Crisis and Prevent the Next Pandemic, on 29 March 2022. Diverse speakers and over 400 participants from around the world collectively identified the following priorities to meet global needs at this stage of the pandemic and build stronger, more resilient, and equitable systems for the future:

## **1. Accelerate equitable access to and acceptance of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics, building for the future.**

Growing scientific evidence suggests that the COVID-19 virus cannot be eradicated — but the virus has also not yet become endemic. Collectively, we must reduce its capacity to do harm. Current vaccines remain essential to protect people from severe disease and prevent the emergence of new variants. Vaccinating the world must remain a top priority.

The next phase of COVID-19 response requires accelerating vaccination – turning growing vaccine supply into shots in arms by strengthening country distribution and delivery capacity and increasing demand for vaccination. Building public trust in vaccines and meeting communities where they are in terms of need, information, and trusted messengers are vital tools to increase uptake and ultimately equitable, widespread vaccination.

National, regional, and global vaccination targets should be robustly supported. We must immediately prioritize fully vaccinating (including boosters) the most vulnerable and high-risk populations, including the elderly and health and other essential workers, to save the most lives, most quickly, as part of efforts to expand vaccination coverage, consistent with WHO strategy and guidelines.

To complement vaccination, we must ensure equitable access to oral antivirals and diagnostics and prioritize the expansion of test-and-treat capabilities, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This will require significant funding commitments, accelerated global manufacturing of quality-assured generic oral antivirals, regulatory support, and strengthening of frontline health systems capacity. We must learn and apply lessons from dramatic disparities in vaccine access to drive equitable access to all tools that can help save lives.

## **2. Support country-led and community-driven goals and priorities, with global support strengthening national and regional systems and advancing equity.**

Countries, regions, and communities know best their needs and priorities — and this extends to pandemic response and preparedness. Global systems and coordination remain important, but global efforts should support national and regional goals and priorities, applying lessons from the past two years.

Putting more power, authority, and design in the hands of communities will empower a more effective and equitable response — for COVID-19 and future health emergencies. Communities, including indigenous communities, and civil society need to be actively engaged to build trust in public health measures, such as mask wearing and vaccination, in order to ensure widespread uptake. Women and members of diverse communities representing intersectional identities must also have equal representation in health leadership — both for equitable and informed decision-making and to build community trust and engagement.

## **3. Build and invest now to pandemic proof the future for everyone, everywhere.**

COVID-19 remains an active geopolitical crisis — but there will be another pandemic. We have to continue to fight the current threat while simultaneously investing in systems and structures to be prepared for the next global health emergency.

To work towards this goal, we must urgently mobilize new and diversified funding to support nationally- and regionally-prioritized needs for the current response as well as pandemic preparedness. A new fund for global health security and pandemic preparedness that is fair and equitable, supports country priorities, builds on the current global health financing architecture, and complements and coordinates across stakeholders, is a priority of Indonesia's leadership of the G20 and one all leaders should rally behind. Joint External Evaluation of countries can also help improve readiness for future pandemics.

The world also needs stronger, more robust and equitable health systems everywhere to respond to health security crises and to other population health needs. This requires investments in a sustainable health workforce, strengthened primary health care, and advances toward universal health coverage. Actions like integrating COVID-19 vaccination into routine immunization programs can lay the foundation for strong systems that can surge during emergencies. These initiatives must address and leverage the new public health order, and establishment of new regional public health agencies similar to the Africa CDC.

Regionally distributed manufacturing capabilities for vaccines, therapies, diagnostic tests, and other critical health tools, linked with pooled procurement systems, must also be supported to enable earlier and more equitable access to health interventions around the world. Global stakeholders should also support the establishment and maintenance of regional stockpiles of emergency supplies, with mechanisms to quickly deliver those supplies when and where needed.

#### **4. Drive accountability at all levels and commit to global solidarity**

We need more than political will to get the job done — we need political action and sustained political commitment. Pandemic fatigue is real, and as public health measures such as masking mandates are loosened, it is tempting for both leaders and the public to view the COVID-19 emergency as over. But we cannot let up.

Leaders must be accountable for taking action — at all levels. But to drive accountability, the public needs to know and understand what is happening and follow up when leaders are failing. Community engagement depends on transparent, easy-to-access data, as well as health literacy.

At the global level, efforts are underway and should be supported to set norms and expectations for how all countries behave in emergency situations, including standards around diverse leadership and decision-making, equity, and access to novel medical countermeasures. Such proactive systems and rules at regional and global levels can accelerate swift, coordinated international decision-making in the crucial early days following an outbreak.

Above all, we must start thinking of the world as one. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to make clear that the health, well-being, and livelihoods of people around the world are interlinked. A global perspective of oneness must inform our policies, investments, priorities, and actions. Everyone counts.

*This is a joint declaration by: Africa CDC, Amref Health Africa, African Population and Health Research Center, Organismo Andino de Salud, Cayetano Heredia University School of Public Health, Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives, COVID GAP, Pandemic Action Network, ONE Campaign, University of Ibadan College of Medicine, and WACI Health.*