



Released 8 June 2021

BRITISH NOBEL LAUREATES CALL ON PRIME MINISTER TO WAIVE VACCINE INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AT G7

Fifteen of the UK's Nobel Prize-winning scientists, economists and peace activists have called on Boris Johnson to “play a historic role” in removing “artificial” intellectual property barriers that are stifling Covid-19 vaccine production

Dear Prime Minister,

We write to you as British citizens and residents, as scientists, economists, and peace activists, and as Nobel laureates to urge the UK government to play a historic role in leading the world to scale up the supply of Covid-19 vaccines, removing all artificial restrictions on their production.

The UK hosts the G7 presidency amid an extraordinary crisis, but also at a time when there is remarkable hope. We have a number of highly effective vaccines that could end this pandemic. However, without urgent action from world leaders, much of that progress could be undone. Last year, science was the main barrier to beating this disease; but today, it is inequality.

Wealthy countries like our own have already vaccinated many of our vulnerable populations and are now well advanced in rolling out vaccines to the young and healthy. This has been a remarkable national effort. However, people in low- and middle-income countries may be waiting until at least 2024 for widespread vaccination.

There is underutilised capacity to produce safe, effective vaccines in many countries, but intellectual property rules have restricted production to the supply chains of a few pharmaceutical companies and a handful of voluntary licences.

More than six months ago at the World Trade Organisation, India and South Africa proposed to waive these intellectual property rules to increase production, but countries like the UK stood in the way.

In that time, low vaccination rates have led to a humanitarian crisis in India and allowed more virulent strains of the virus to develop. History may look back on that moment as a missed opportunity to avoid our present crisis. However, action can still be taken to avoid future crises.

With millions of people newly contracting Covid-19 each week, the risk of vaccine-resistant mutations will only increase. That threatens to prolong the pandemic, resulting in only more devastating damage to our economy and businesses, and risking a 5.15% loss to the UK's GDP. This is an unprecedented crisis, existential in nature, and unprecedented action is needed to address it.

Britain has been a substantial donor to COVAX, the multilateral effort to share doses with, and buy doses for, low-income nations. But donations are no substitute for countries around the world being able to manufacture their own vaccines. At best, COVAX will only provide vaccines for up to 30% of participating nations' populations, which will not halt the spread of this virus. And the programme is currently lagging far behind targets.

The Biden administration in the United States now supports an intellectual property waiver to address the crisis in vaccine supplies. At this week's G7 summit in Cornwall, you have an opportunity to show that the UK stands with our closest friend and ally by announcing the UK's own support for a waiver as part of a broader plan to scale up global vaccine production and end this pandemic.

An intellectual property waiver is an essential step to increase vaccine production. It must come alongside measures to ensure that pharmaceutical companies share their vaccine technology and know-how through the World Health Organisation's Covid-19 Technology Access Pool. So too must investment be directed towards manufacturing vaccines in low-and-middle-income countries.

And let us be clear: waiving intellectual property still means that pharmaceutical companies can be remunerated fairly for their contributions to this effort. However, there has been unprecedented public investment in these vaccines, including from British taxpayers, and granting monopoly control of the resulting vaccines is neither fair nor right.

Each of us has dedicated our careers to the advancement of human knowledge, health, and progress, working in and beyond the UK to have a global impact. It is in that spirit that we ask you to do everything in your power to serve all of humanity and announce the UK's support for an intellectual property waiver on Covid-19 vaccines and treatments.

Prime Minister, this is a historic moment that will define your legacy on the global stage. We hope that you can show the values of a truly Global Britain and commit to putting lives above all else. Let the history books remember Britain as a force of good that stood high over monopoly interests and patents, and helped deliver a people's vaccine for the whole world.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Richard J. Roberts, 1993 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

Sir Tim Hunt, 2001 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

Sir Paul M. Nurse, 2001 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

John O'Keefe, 2014 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

Michael Houghton, 2020 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine

Tomas Lindahl, 2015 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Sir James Fraser Stoddart, 2016 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Richard Henderson, 2017 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

Didier Queloz, 2019 Nobel Prize in Physics

Sir Anthony J. Leggett, 2003 Nobel Prize in Physics

Konstantin Novoselov, 2010 Nobel Prize in Physics

Andrew Geim, 2010 Nobel Prize in Physics

Brian D. Josephson, 1973 Nobel Prize in Physics

Mairead Corrigan-Maguire, 1976 Nobel Peace Prize

Sir Christopher A. Pissarides, 2010 Nobel Prize in Economic Science