



We are only safe when everyone is safe: aviation unions join call for TRIPS waiver to fight Covid

ITF civil aviation unions today joined growing calls for governments to pass an emergency waiver to enable universal access to Covid-19 vaccines, treatments and equipment.

With a devastating second wave tearing its way through the heart of numerous countries - including most notably India - governments are being urged to support the proposal put forward by India and South Africa to the World Trade Organization in October 2020. The proposal calls for emergency waivers on intellectual property rights under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) specifically related to “prevention, containment and treatment” of the Covid-19 virus.

The devastation being caused by the virus in developing countries across the world, and the enormous inequality in access to vaccination and treatment, tragically means that the poorest in society are suffering the most.

Across the world, healthcare systems continue to be overwhelmed, resulting in deaths that could be avoided with sufficient access to medication, oxygen, equipment, and the protection that vaccination offers.

Developed economies have placed large orders for a variety of vaccines, often for quantities far larger than the size of their respective populations. At the same time, many countries are still waiting to receive even the first vial of a single vaccine.

Witnessing the daily cases and deaths in India is a brutal reminder of what can happen when profit is put before people.

The proliferation of the disease in countries like the United Kingdom, Brazil, South Africa and India, has given rise to more virulent, deadlier strains of the virus. Despite travel restrictions and attempts to isolate strains, they continue to emerge even in countries with large scale vaccination programmes and can setback even relatively successful national recovery efforts.

The only way to successfully suppress Covid-19 is to do so globally and simultaneously. The call to remove all barriers to the production, distribution and access to vaccines and all other medical products and technologies is to ensure this is both possible and achievable.

For aviation, every resurgence of the virus and every new travel restriction sets back the recovery of our industry. In 2020, the pandemic caused demand for international travel to drop by 75%. International travel is the heart of the aviation industry globally and many nations’ aviation industries and large parts of their economies are entirely based on it. In countries with domestic aviation routes, international travel is a key driver for the domestic

aviation industry. As unions representing aviation workers, we know intimately that a true recovery from this pandemic can only occur when every country recovers.

Vaccine inequality, coupled with the role that a small number of countries are playing in blocking the TRIPS waiver and universal access to Covid-19 vaccines, treatments and equipment, has no place in a civilised world.

This is an emergency, when action is more urgent and important than ever. It is not just an economic question, but a moral question that is quite literally about life and death. For us in aviation, this is an industrial question too.

We call on all nations to back the proposal from South Africa and India at the WTO, which is already supported by over 100 countries, and pass the emergency waiver on TRIPS. We call on all trade unions to join us and lobby their governments to this effect.

Civil Aviation Section Committee, ITF, 28 April 2021