

Covid-19 - Vaccine apartheid, a strategy of social murder

Tuesday 12 October 2021, by [GUERRERO Dorothy Grace](#) (Date first published: 11 October 2021).

The organisation of our economies has driven two of the biggest global crises the world faces: pandemics, of which Covid-19 will not be the last, and the climate and ecological breakdown. On top of actual infections and deaths experienced by families, Covid-19 is also affecting every person and community due to lockdowns, prolonged workplace closures, suspension of classes, travel restrictions and general economic impacts. However, it does not do so equally. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and injustices and the structural inequalities play a significant role in determining who lives and who dies.

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Experts say [Covid-19 survivors may go on to develop long Covid](#), creating a generation left with chronic health problems and disability, the personal and economic impacts of which might be felt for decades to come. The UN has already acknowledged that Covid-19 has also wiped out years of progress in the 15-year global work on the [Sustainable Development Goals by 2030](#), which was already off track in 2019.

India and South Africa proposed a temporary waiver of the intellectual property agreement or TRIPS Agreement on all Covid-19-related technologies at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on 2 October 2020. The waiver would allow manufacturers in global south countries to produce Covid-19 vaccines patent-free to accelerate the manufacture of vaccines and get access to knowledge and know-how that are protected by trade secrets owned by several pharmaceutical companies.

More than 100 countries are now backing the waiver, but a handful of countries, including some hosting major pharmaceutical firms such as Switzerland, remain opposed. The UK is also one of the last opponents to the waiver. An average of [10,193 people have died from Covid-19 each day](#) that the British government has blocked attempts to waive intellectual property for coronavirus vaccines and treatments. The official total is 3.7 million deaths over the last year, though experts believe the real total is likely much higher.

A strategy of social murder?

In February 2021, Dr Kamran Abbasi wrote in the [editorial of the British Medical Journal](#) that politicians who didn't respond aggressively enough to control the Covid-19 pandemic should be held responsible for the deaths, which could be classified as "social murder". He attributed the term to Friedrich Engels who coined it to describe the conditions created by the capitalist class in 19th century England that "inevitably led to premature and 'unnatural' death among the poorest classes".

It seems that today's global elite wilfully created the same condition again in this century. The inefficiency of many governments in addressing a health emergency and ensuring everyone has access to life-saving vaccines contributed to a global pandemic. This is because there is still a prevalent belief among politicians in market fundamentalism or that the market should have primacy over people's health and human rights.

According to a statement from the People's Vaccine Alliance, "[at least nine people have become new billionaires](#) since the beginning of the Covid pandemic, thanks to the excessive profits pharmaceutical corporations with monopolies on Covid vaccines are making." The global condition we are seeing now where millions have already died and millions more will continue to die in premature and unnatural deaths to allow a few to become billionaires is nothing short of a *strategy of social murder*.

Charity is failing

More people globally will die if Boris Johnson's government continue its hypocrisy of donating vaccines while stopping more manufacturers from producing the vaccines. Of the 6.13 billion doses administered globally, just [0.2 percent](#) of the vaccines went into the arms of people in low-income countries. As richer countries are already rolling out booster shots, 98% of people in low-income countries remain unvaccinated.

Overall [only 4% of all vaccines](#) produced worldwide have been channelled through Covax, the World Health Organisation's global bulk purchasing agency set up last year to ensure equitable vaccine distribution. It recently announced it would [miss its 2 billion target for 2021](#). Covax is failing to deliver because it is not changing global power dynamics. Instead of a globally collaborative initiative that governments should support to get the pandemic under control it relies on charity. Although it is supplying vaccines, it has been criticized for what it doesn't do - namely, equip nations with the knowledge and infrastructure to produce their own.

Even though public funding has paid for research, development and manufacturing, the vaccines are treated as the privately-owned assets of a profit-driven industry and distribution is left to the market. Instead of blocking the TRIPS waiver, the UK should use its influence as a major funder to ensure treatments and vaccines produced from publicly-funded research are openly licensed to enable any producer to manufacture them and they are affordable for all countries.

This is a failure of governments - especially rich countries like the UK, which is supposed to have a democratic political system, while in reality being so deferential to corporate power. Instead of approaching the pandemic with global solidarity, rich countries have been unable and unwilling to pursue genuine international cooperation outside the logic of private profit.

The virus continues to mutate. It can change into versions that transmit from person to person faster or more easily, that are deadlier and worse, can overcome current vaccines.

Where is hope? Hope lies in the reality that the demand for a people's vaccine is popular, and people understand that we can only be safe when everyone, everywhere is safe. We need to make that stand heard in the WTO.

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P.S.

• Global Justice Now. Date: 11 October 2021:

<https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/blog/2021/10/vaccine-apartheid-a-strategy-of-social-murder/>