



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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***Note:** This letter has been sent today to Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin bin Hj Mohd Yassin and the ministers of MITI, MOSTI, Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs and MOH.*

Malaysia must support the WTO waiver on intellectual property rights for COVID-19 – If Not Now When?

The undersigned organisations and patient advocacy groups strongly call on the Malaysian Government to immediately support the temporary suspension of intellectual property rights enforcement as an urgent COVID-19 response.

A waiver of the World Trade Organization's agreement on intellectual property rights (the TRIPS Agreement) would free up technologies and allow more manufacturers, including in developing countries, to urgently and quickly ramp up production of vaccines, medicines to treat COVID-19, diagnostics, ventilators and other needed medical products.

We welcome the 5 May announcement by the Biden Administration that the US will stop blocking the waiver proposal first submitted by South Africa and India to the WTO in October 2020 and now supported by more than 100 developing countries. A global campaign that saw the tsunami of calls from ordinary citizens to Nobel Laureates, former Heads of State and even Pope Francis has been urging the US, European Union, Japan, Canada and other wealthy countries to not block the waiver.

From October 2020 till last month, WTO discussions have gone nowhere because the blocking countries and the pharmaceutical industry behind them have put profits and self-interest above lives of the rest of the world. The result is vaccine production that is a monopoly of a few companies holding patents and trade secrets over technology know-how, and vaccine hoarding by wealthy nations, ending up with more than they need while many poor countries can barely vaccinate their health frontliners. This has triggered outrage across the world.

We have urged the Malaysian Government to join the other developing countries since last November. While the Government has secured vaccines for Malaysia, the actual delivery is totally dependent on the small number of suppliers, and there is no guarantee that we will get all we need. Look at India where the biggest manufacturer for AstraZeneca cannot export anymore because what they produce is not even enough for India itself.

The waiver that the WTO members have to adopt is not just about vaccines. It is also about medicines for treating COVID-19, diagnostics, ventilator valves, and a range of needed medical products that have patents, trade secrets and other intellectual property protection. The US supports waiver of patent and other intellectual property for vaccines which is a first step, but it is not enough.

With the new waves of infections and more virulent variants, infections are soaring. Malaysia is on a worrying upward trend with the Ministry of Health already raising the alarm that our intensive care beds are fast reaching full use. Every country including Malaysia must be prepared for this pandemic that is going to stretch for several years. Some existing medicines that are under clinical trials with potential for COVID-19 treatment are locked up in patents in Malaysia. Our local pharmaceutical industry can be part for the national health and security preparedness but they need the freedom to operate that a WTO waiver can help to speed up,

We call on the Government to not delay anymore, and to support the waiver for vaccines and also for treatment medicines, diagnostics and all the medical products needed for COVID-19.

We thank you and look forward to Malaysia joining the vast majority of the world's governments in this urgently needed race against COVID-19.

Signed by:

Organisations and coalitions

1. Agora Society Malaysia
2. Allied Coordinating Council of Muslim NGOs Malaysia
3. Amnesty International
4. Consumers Association of Penang (CAP)
5. Health Equity Initiatives (HEI)
6. Gerakan Kepenggunaan Masjid
7. Ikatan Pengamal Perubatan dan Kesihatan Muslim Malaysia
8. Ikatan Intelegensia Membangun Malaysia
9. Jaringan Ekologi & Iklim (JEDI)
10. Majlis Tindakan Ekonomi Melayu Bersatu Berhad
11. Malaysian AIDS Council
12. Malaysia Citizens' Health Initiative
13. Malaysian Consumers Movement
14. Persatuan Kebajikan Sokongan Keluarga Selangor dan Kuala Lumpur (Family Frontiers)
15. Pertubuhan Penggerak Masyarakat Malaysia
16. Pertubuhan Muafakat Sejahtera Masyarakat Malaysia
17. Majlis Tindakan Ekonomi Melayu Bersatu Berhad (MTEM)
18. Majlis Perundingan Pertubuhan Islam Malaysia
19. Missing Positive Malaysian Treatment Access & Advocacy Group (MTAAG+)
20. Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM)
21. Penang Forum
22. Pertubuhan Kebajikan Vivekananda Rembau NS
23. Pertubuhan Wanita Malaysia untuk Kawalan Tembakau dan Kesihatan (MyWATCH)
24. Persatuan WeCareJourney
25. Pertubuhan Persaudaraan Pesawah Malaysia
26. PT Foundation
27. Prostate Cancer Society Malaysia
28. Pusat Kecemerlangan Pendidikan Ummah
29. Sahabat Alam Malaysia
30. The International Women's Alliance for Family Institution and Quality Education
31. Third World Network
32. Together against Cancer
33. Teras Pengupayaan Melayu

Individuals:

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