



AFTINET
Australian Fair Trade
& Investment Network Ltd

Level 7, 321 Pitt Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Phone: 02 9699 3686
Email: campaign@aftinet.org.au
ACN 097 603 131
ABN 83 659 681 462
www.aftinet.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian WTO vaccine proposal not enough to speed up access for low income countries

The Australian Fair Trade and Investment Network (AFTINET) today criticised a [World Trade Organisation communication co-sponsored by Australia and only six other countries](#) as an alternative to the proposal by South Africa and India to temporarily waive intellectual property rights to enable more equitable global access to COVID vaccines.

The South African proposal is supported by 100 developing countries in the WTO, and addresses the fact that under current WTO rules, more than 85 developing countries will not have widespread access to COVID-19 vaccines before 2023.

AFTINET is a sponsor of a [letter from 18 national organisations](#), including the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the Australian Council For International Development, the Public Health Association and the Salvation Army calling on the Australian government to support the waiver proposal from South Africa and India.

“It is positive that the Australian proposal acknowledges the need to scale up vaccine production, because these are ‘exceptional’ times”, AFTINET Convener Dr Patricia Ranald said today.

“But the proposal only suggests that the WTO would assist in using existing ‘flexibilities’ under the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), rather than a patent waiver,” said Dr Ranald.

“The Australian proposal would still result in delays because current WTO flexibilities require each country to negotiate with each pharmaceutical company for access to each vaccine, and access is ultimately controlled by the companies. This puts the profits of pharmaceutical companies above the lives of billions in low-income countries. The temporary patent waiver is a quicker and fairer way of ensuring access to vaccines. That is why most low-income countries support it.”

The proposals are being discussed at a WTO meeting currently underway.

Contact Dr Patricia Ranald 0419 695 841