Minister Mkhize Opening Remarks

6th ACT-Accelerator Facilitation Council

12 May 2021, 12h30-15h00

Thank you Minister Ulstein and Co-Hosts

- It's my honor to welcome you to this 6th ACT-Accelerator Facilitation Council meeting
- We are meeting at a time when the global picture for Covid-19 is concerning.
- The number of cases is still rising in some countries. This is stretching health systems almost beyond their ability to provide patients with necessary lifesaving care. In some places death rates are creeping up again, and in the last few days, experts are registering concerns about possible 3rd waves.
- Unequal access to vaccines continues to persist. Five months into 2021, the entire African continent has vaccinated under 1% of its people. Most countries cannot get hold of vaccine doses even to vaccinate health workers who are in contact with Covid patients daily. In contrast, some countries on other continents have vaccinated over 60% of their populations. This is an inequality we could not have imagined a year ago as we discussed principles of equity, access and solidarity.
- Delayed vaccine supplies, inadequate quantities of oxygen and other supplies plus the emergence of new variants are a very real global threat. Sadly, some of these bottlenecks could be stopped or prevented.

- We are calling for increased political commitment to change this narrative. Needed tools like vaccines, diagnostic tests, oxygen and some late-stage medicines are available. The problem is the Access barrier.

- The situation in some countries, such as reported by India, is worrying and points to the need for stronger global solidarity. Covid-19 can be vicious, we need to take bold political decisions.

- Our meeting today will help answer some questions we are discussing for increasing vaccine capacity. South Africa and Germany will Co- chair a Working Group focusing on COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing to support COVAX.

- The main objectives of the Working Group on Vaccine Manufacturing will be, among others:

  - increase supply of vaccine doses to COVAX to ensure equitable distribution by addressing supply chains of raw material and vaccines

  - identify barriers, including potential IP barriers, for fully use of those capacities through technology transfer and sharing of trade secrets

  - facilitate the identification of potentially under-utilized/idle capacity for vaccine manufacturing for viral vector, mRNA and other vaccine technologies in all regions

  - facilitate mutually agreeable solutions for technology transfer from vaccine manufacturing companies with approved products

- We will also address uptake and use of available COVID-19 tools like tests, treatments and PPE at the country level and how the Health Systems Connector pillar can at the country level.

- There will be an update on ACT-A Financing. We appreciate positive signals from the G7 Foreign & Development Ministers on funding the ACT Accelerator Pillars.
- A few months ago, my country, along with India, championed, the need to address patent protection which is a barrier to access. We believe the implementation of the TRIPS Waiver will go some way in driving increased production of vaccines. Already over 70+ countries at the WTO, the African Union Commission and WHO have seen the value add of such a proposal. We are grateful to President Biden of the US for his support and that of more than 100 countries.
- As I close, I would like to make this strong appeal to all countries to support this measure at the World Trade Organization. My friend Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director General of WTO and former envoy to the ACT Accelerator, has kindly joined us today.
- The ACT-Accelerator cannot achieve its promise unless we walk the talk. Action must follow words. Human tragedies from inaction are a reality. As Dr Tedros has said so poignantly " If not now, then when ?
- Colleagues, an extraordinary situation requires an extra-ordinary response; how can more than 3 & a quarter million deaths, and a pandemic out of control, not be extraordinary?