



Summary of the intervention by Carlos Correa, Executive Director of the South Centre, at the UN General Assembly - Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response Multi-Stakeholder Hearing, New York, May 9th, 2023

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic revealed serious shortcomings in the multilateral system. Despite solemn declarations, it was unable to ensure equity in addressing its health, economic and social impacts. Many developing countries lost much of what they had achieved in poverty reduction and in achieving other Sustainable Development Goals.

A clear manifestation of inequity was the failure of COVAX to meet the needs of developing countries regarding access to vaccines. This was not just an issue about funding, but rather the lack of a true multilateral governance of that mechanism.

The rigidities of the international intellectual property regime, the absence of measures for technology transfer despite massive public subsidies, contributed to the inequity that disproportionately affected developing countries. Profits rather than public health needs dominated the response to the pandemic.

Also contributing to this situation was the manifest lack of solidarity on the part of countries with greater resources, which did not hesitate to hoard doses of vaccines in excess of their needs. The message of this behavior was that the life or health of a person in a rich country seemed to be worth more than that of a person in a poor country.

Going forward, transformative solutions and new forms of state-led international cooperation are needed. We look to the members of the United Nations to provide the necessary political commitments to achieve this goal.

A new multilaterally governed mechanism, not a mere reformulation of COVAX, is needed to ensure equitable access to products for the prevention and treatment of new pandemics.

A mechanism for sharing of clinical information as well as of technologies is also needed to speed up regulatory approvals and rapidly expand manufacturing capacity on a global scale, without the threat of intellectual property claims.

Similarly, a fair system for sharing the benefits derived from the utilization of pathogen information under the international regime on access to genetic resources is needed.

It is also critical that actions to achieve equity address differences in financial and human resources for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The concept of equity precisely assumes that not all countries have the same capabilities and resources to prepare for, cope with and recover from a pandemic, and that it is therefore necessary to redress existing imbalances.

In short, equity must not only be recognized as a general principle of a rhetorical nature, but must be implemented through new mechanisms and measures that, in particular, provide WHO with the necessary tools to act in the interests of global health.

The ongoing negotiations of a new international instrument on pandemics and the revision of the International Health Regulations offer an opportunity to create a multilateral regime that overcomes the serious failures in the management of COVID-19, failures that are reprehensible not only from an ethical point of view but also from the perspective of a multilateral system for public health based on international cooperation and solidarity.