

## **Protestant and Jewish leaders call for just distribution of Covid-19 vaccines**



*A nurse prepares to administer a Covid-19 vaccine in Kuwait (AFP or licensors)*

The World Council of Churches and the World Jewish Congress are urging religious leaders to help ensure an equitable distribution of Covid-19 vaccines to all nations around the world.

**Lisa Zengarini, Vatican News, 24 December 2020**

Religious leaders and organizations have a critical role and responsibility to make their voices heard in policy discussions concerning Covid-19 vaccine distribution, since they are “fundamentally ethical in nature,” say the World Council of Churches and (WCC) the World Jewish Congress (WJC).

In a joint paper released on 22 December, they invite world religious leaders to reflect and engage on these issues.

The document points out that the new vaccines do not offer an immediate or complete solution to the pandemic, as global need and demand will outstrip supply in the short to medium term, thus posing important ethical questions that should of particular concern for religious leaders and organizations.

### **Solidarity, not vaccine nationalism**

According to the two organizations, at the international level "a key concern" is for global equity in the distribution of available vaccines, so that poorer countries are not excluded from access to these life-saving products.

The establishment of COVAX – a partnership between GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization), WHO (World Health Organization), and CEPI (Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations) - to address the issue is an important step towards international solidarity.

However, WCC and WJC are concerned about “vaccine nationalism”, through which higher income countries attain higher levels of vaccine supply, leaving less available for equitable global allocation. This issue has been also raised by Pope Francis.

## **Non-discriminatory distribution**

At the domestic level, frameworks for the allocation of the limited number of vaccines should be based on a clear and specific choice of the priority objectives most valued in the context of each country. The paper lists these priorities as: bringing about the swiftest end to the pandemic; protecting the most vulnerable; ensuring that health workers are protected and that the public health system is not overwhelmed; avoiding general and long-term harm to the economy; education and future prospects of young people.

According to the WCC and the WJC, it is “of critical importance” that this choice, its moral justification and the process through which the choice is made “be communicated publicly and transparently”, and that it is “consistently applied, in a non-discriminatory manner.”

Scriptural principles

Drawing from the common scriptural teachings of both the Jewish and Christian traditions on the God-given dignity of every human being and the commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves, the paper recalls the attention on two fundamental principles that should guide states in deciding their priorities.

The first principle is equity, by which available resources should be allocated without discrimination on grounds of race, ethnicity, colour, gender, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation, nationality, social status or ability to pay. The second principle is the human right to health.

## **Confronting conspiracy theories**

The WCC and WJC also urge religious leaders of all faiths to “consider confronting publicly the unsubstantiated rumours and conspiracy myths, promoted without evidence, that undermine public trust in health authorities and services and in tested and approved vaccines themselves – and that thereby threaten an effective public health response to the pandemic. In some cases, such conspiracy myths have an explicitly anti-semitic basis which should in any event be denounced.”

Finally, regarding the controversial issue of making vaccination compulsory, or at least an essential precondition for access to certain public services or private facilities, the two organizations admit that “in the current exceptional context” of efforts to control the global pandemic, legitimate public health considerations “may justify measures that would otherwise be considered draconian.”