

DECLARATION ON VACCINE EQUITY AND HESITANCY ACROSS ASIA-PACIFIC

Bangkok, 31 January 2022

Action by Churches Together (ACT) Alliance is a coalition of more than 140 churches and church-related organisations working together in over 120 countries to create positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their religion, politics, gender, race or nationality in keeping with the highest international codes and standards. ACT Alliance is faith-motivated, rights-based, impact focused, committed to working ecumenically and inter-religiously, with the communities we seek to serve and accompany at the centre of our work.

The ACT Alliance Asia-Pacific Regional Forum co-convened an Asia-Pacific Workshop on Vaccine Equity and Hesitancy on the 31st of January of 2022, with strategic partners such as UNICEF, the WHO, World Vision International, the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the Pacific Conference of Churches, YAKKUM and CCDB. The workshop was inspired by fruitful exchanges and deep reflections that drew on the wealth of expertise of speakers, moderators and participants across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond such as those highlighted by the [ACT Africa Vaccine Workshop](#).

As a result of these exchanges and the state of play of vaccination across the Asia-Pacific region, we have come together to issue a joint declaration demanding urgent and transformative action in the area of vaccine equity and hesitancy.

Putting People First

As already highlighted in the ACT Alliance vaccine equity brief, we are appalled by the vaccine divide created by profit-seeking behaviour and self-serving practices that undermine equal access to COVID-19 vaccines.¹ We believe that the global community can and should do more to save lives, improve the well-being of all human beings, promote peace and ensure the realisation of all human rights.

Although vaccine coverage across the region has increased, we see that most Asia Pacific countries still have only reached around 40% of the population.² This average percentage varies when we zoom into specific contexts and at different levels. Some countries like Papua New Guinea have less than 5%

¹ ACT Alliance, 2021. [Policy Brief - Putting People First: Equal Access to COVID-19 Vaccines](#). See also ACT Alliance; 2021. [Statement - Ensuring Justice for Humanity by Addressing Pandemics as a Moral and Legal Obligation: A Call for a Legally Binding Pandemic Treaty](#).

² For more, see [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Vaccinations - Our World in Data](#).

coverage.³ We are aware that there have been pledges and promises from certain countries but as long as this does not lead to actual vaccines into the arms of people, such promises are empty words. This is absurd when we compare with overall numbers of vaccination globally where a whopping 80% have gone to G20 countries.⁴

The members of the ACT Alliance and the under-signed strategic partners are concerned, and we are deeply affected by this vaccine inequity and we call out on the current divide as well as misinformation campaigns and fake news promoted by a discreet number of stakeholders, including some faith actors.

These issues have fundamental effects over already vulnerable communities we work with because misinformation and myths erode people's trust in vaccines while those that are eager to take vaccines currently struggle to find vaccine doses in many contexts.

We recognize from our ecumenical and inter-religious vocation that it is both necessary and urgent to achieve vaccine equity and uptake.

We, as faith and secular actors devoted to protecting and promoting the value of human life, dignity and justice, commit to:

- Putting in place, with immediate effect, actions on vaccine equity addressing Asia-Pacific national governments, regional bodies, faith communities and relevant constituencies.
- Mapping the availability of an evidence base on what best works to stop misinformation on COVID-19 vaccines.
- Strengthening joint action by designing regional, national and local evidence-based vaccine confidence campaigns and facilitating peer-to-peer learning across local and faith actors.
- Developing strong interfaith communication strategies on COVID-19 which will include religious texts from the bible or other religious books to engage the people of all faiths to fight the pandemic.
- Developing guidance on safer religious practices which will integrate COVID-19 prevention in all religious practices and gatherings.
- Challenging the widespread vaccine hesitancy in our region by promoting vaccine confidence in local communities through the amplification of the voices of faith leaders, and other positive role models, using local languages where possible.
- Ensuring that citizens, community and faith leaders and medical staff are equipped to make decisions with the right information as well as able to identify misinformation, and how to navigate competing messages and engage with the measures put forward by governments.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

- Supporting, to the extent that is possible, initiatives focusing on strengthening the capacity and safety of health professionals to promote and give good guidance on vaccine uptake, especially to those with existing health conditions, and to give clear information on the potential symptoms of the vaccine and how to manage them.
- Establishing innovative partnerships with multimedia stakeholders, including networks of community and faith-based radio and TV stations, and social media, in further amplifying the message of vaccine confidence.
- Calling upon faith leaders and civil society groups such as organisations of persons with disabilities, women's rights groups and older peoples' associations to engage in adequate awareness raising to address hesitancy and misinformation, to support science-based life-saving messages, to use the standard COVID-19 preventative public health measures and to follow guidelines that can prevent transmission.
- Those of us who are part of health systems delivery, we commit to equip our services to the best of our ability and to delivering high quality care and leading by example.
- Strengthening engagement and protection of marginalised communities and those in hard to reach areas to ensure we leave no one behind.

As a result of that, we urgently demand Asia Pacific national governments and regional bodies to:

- Strengthen public health systems by increasing health budgets and ensuring that the COVID-19 response is not at the expense of routine services such as the immunization of children, maternal health and primary health services.
- Ensure no groups are left behind by supporting a vaccine storage and distribution system, providing reasonable accommodation including accessible information and education on vaccines, in order to reach those hardest to reach, in particular those that do not have ID cards and/or lack access to social protection systems or to health care services.
- Guarantee accountability when reporting on the numbers of people affected by COVID-19 as well as the availability and distribution of vaccines to ensure no resources are wasted and that we have traceable, disaggregated and reliable data.
- Uphold the rights of all to those that do not have access to vaccines as well promoting supportive vaccine campaigns that do not exclude and disproportionately impact those who are hesitant.
- Being proactive in terms of joint vaccine procurement and taking advantage of schemes such as the COVAX facility and, where there is difficulty in supply through COVAX or any facility, to develop coordinated and proactive action to speak out in unison at the highest level / in talks with key players such as China, the EU, UK and the US.
- Being proactive in supporting its local authorities and member states to finance capacity enhancement in health systems and emergency responses while also continuing to ensure timely procurement of vaccines.

- Ensure that the people in conflict-ridden and other crisis areas are included and reached by the vaccination efforts on the basis of humanitarian impartiality and neutrality.

Lastly, we urge countries housing vaccine production and those with large vaccine stocks to:

- Immediately sharing doses without delay, with thorough planning with reception countries; guaranteeing affordable prices, fair allocation and prioritisation while taking into consideration the price in relation to GDP.
- Resolving liability issues and avoiding the distributions of vaccines too close to expiry or those coming in slow waves between doses.
- Committing to at least 5% of overall supply to equitable vaccine distribution and prioritising vaccine equity over booster shots.
- Increasing production and transferring capacity, technology and production, temporarily waiving patents and IP rights to enable manufacturing in the Global South as well as sharing of technology and know-how through the C-TAP mechanisms.
- Being responsive to where there is untapped potential and a strong call from faith leaders in relation to the moral responsibility to value human life and dignity above all else.
- Ensuring COVAX is inclusive and responsive to civil society's demands as well as supporting the initiative for a treaty on global pandemic preparedness that protects the health and livelihoods of all.
- Prioritize high risk groups including the people living with HIV/AIDS, people with palliative care conditions, people with disabilities, the key and most vulnerable populations.
- Creating a more robust form of global pandemic preparedness that protects the health and livelihoods of all and supporting a COVAX initiative that establishes active social listening and recognises the fundamental role played by civil society actors in COVID-19 mechanisms.

Signatories:

ACT Alliance

Act Church of Sweden

Anglicans in Development (AID)

Anglican Overseas Aid

Bread for the World (Pacific)

CASA (Church's Auxiliary for Social Action) India

Center for Disaster Risk Management and Community Development Studies (CDRM&CDS)
Nommensen HKBP University

Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDBBD)

Churches of Christ Overseas Aid

Church World Service (CWS) Japan

Cordaid (Catholic Organization for Relief and Development Aid) - ICCO (Interchurch Coordination Committee Development Aid)

Christian World Service Aotearoa New Zealand

Synodical Board of Social Services, Church of North India (CNI-SBSS)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Lutheran World Service India Trust (LWSIT)

National Christian Council in Japan

National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP)

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)

Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC)

World Renew

YAKKUM (Yayasan Kristen untuk Kesehatan Umum) Emergency Unit