

WIN WITHOUT WAR



Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Waive. The. Patents.

The Takeaway:

- Global patent rules are blocking the production of urgently-needed vaccines and medical supplies while millions suffer from deadly new waves of the pandemic.
- The United States is standing in the way of a proposal to waive intellectual property rules for the duration of the crisis. While Big Pharma profits, the rest of the world is paying the price.
- We call on President Biden to use the upcoming May 5 World Trade Organization meeting to put people before profit and #FreeTheVaccine

Public Health or Pharma Profits: It's Time for Biden to Choose

As more and more people across the United States get vaccinated, it's easy to feel like the worst of the pandemic is behind us. But for most of the world, that couldn't be further from the truth. India. Brazil. Iran. Across the globe, hospitals are overflowing, funeral pyres are burning, and countless are mourning the loss of their loved ones — all because of a virus that we already have a vaccine for. It didn't have to be this way.

Thousands of people die from Covid-19 every day in large part because a few pharmaceutical companies are holding the world's vaccine supplies hostage. And the United States is complicit.

Vaccine Apartheid

Rich countries represent about 16% of the world population. Yet they have administered fully [half](#) of all Covid vaccinations so far. Meanwhile, the world's poorest countries have collectively managed to vaccinate [less than one](#) percent of their populations. At current rates, it will take until [2023](#) or later before there are enough vaccinations for the whole world. This gross inequity in vaccine distribution is effectively a [global health apartheid](#). And like apartheid, it is no accident — it is a deliberate policy choice, designed to benefit the colonizing, primarily white, few at the expense of the colonized, primarily BIPOC, many.

The Right to Hoard

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Right now, the world *could* be producing exponentially more vaccines. We have the technology. The problem is, our current system of trade law, embodied in the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property (TRIPS) has granted Big Pharma companies monopolies over their vaccine production. Because of these patent monopolies, other countries and manufacturers are legally barred from making life-saving vaccines in the middle of a raging pandemic — all so companies like Pfizer and Moderna can charge monopoly prices for a vaccine that was primarily [publicly funded](#). In other words, we are letting thousands of people die needlessly across the world so that Pfizer executives can get a nicer bonus check.

Déjà Vu

We've seen this all play out before. At the peak of the AIDS crisis, roughly [2 million people](#) died from the disease each year in Africa alone — this despite the fact that a near-miraculous treatment known as antiretroviral therapy was already widely available in the wealthy world. Why the disparity? Because pharmaceutical patents kept the price of life-saving medicine far out of reach of the average person in the Global South. Ultimately, after a global movement fought back, the production of generic AIDS drugs was made legal, and treatment prices [dropped](#) from an outrageous \$10,000 per year to an accessible \$350. But not before millions of lives had been sacrificed for corporate profit. Now, we're repeating the same mistakes.

The U.S. vs. the World

Fortunately, there's a simple fix. South Africa and India — having learned their lesson from the AIDS crisis — have introduced a proposal at the WTO to waive patent restrictions on Covid-19 vaccines and other critical medical supplies for the duration of the crisis. Since its introduction last year, the proposal has gained the support of [nearly 100 countries](#) including the African and Least Developed Countries groups at the WTO. But so far, the United States and Europe — home to most of the Big Pharma companies — have stood in the way.

Take Action Now

That's where you come in. President Biden — who has sole authority over the U.S. position on the issue — has come under immense pressure to put peoples' lives before private profit and support the TRIPS waiver. So far, this campaign has included: a [global civil society letter](#) signed by 400+ organizations; a petition [signed by](#) over *2 million* people; a [letter](#) from more than 170 world leaders and nobel laureates; a [letter](#) from 10 U.S. senators; [demonstrations](#) in the UK, South Africa, Germany, Italy, Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and DC; and much more. Biden is already feeling the heat. And with the WTO meeting next week, now is the time to turn things up. (See [here](#) for demonstrations in your area, or if you can't join in person, send a postcard to President Biden [here](#) — both via our partners at Justice Is Global).

More To Be Done

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Passing the TRIPS waiver alone won't solve the pandemic. There's much more that can — and must — be done: donating more vaccines and supplies; funding the COVAX facility, which provides vaccines to low-income countries; compelling companies to share know-how with generic manufacturers; lifting suffocating sanctions on countries like Iran; and simply ending the practice of vaccine hoarding (high-income countries have so far purchased enough to vaccinate their entire populations [twice](#)). And fault doesn't lie with Global North countries alone: India and Brazil's current crises are fueled in large part by the unique incompetence, inhumanity, and brutality of the [Modi](#) and [Bolsonaro](#) governments. But the bare fact remains: obstructing global vaccine production in the midst of a pandemic at the [behest](#) of Big Pharma is a gross injustice.

The Water's Edge

Our values do not stop at the water's edge. This is one of the core [principles](#) of a progressive foreign policy. While Biden's presidency has seen a rapid improvement on the handling of the pandemic domestically, his lack of support for a TRIPS waiver thus far is a total failure of foreign policy and a rejection of this fundamental principle. **It is also a violation of a Biden campaign promise, as activist Ady Barkin explains in this [must-watch 3-minute video](#).** Unfortunately, it may also be an omen of bad things to come. From future pandemics to the climate crisis, the world depends on our ability to [transform](#) our corporate-friendly intellectual property rules (and [trade rules](#) more broadly), [share vital technologies](#), and cooperate for global solutions to global problems.

Free The Vaccine

If this pandemic should have taught us anything, it's that security is not a zero-sum game. In India and South Africa, new, deadlier, more vaccine-resistant variants of the virus have already emerged. Our failure to provide an equitable global vaccine rollout is not just a terrible injustice — it's a threat to all of us. When it comes to pandemics, like most of the 21st centuries' security challenges: no one is safe until all of us are safe. For the people of India, the people of the United States, the people of the whole world: it's time to put human life over corporate profit. It's time to free the vaccine.

100 Days In

As Biden reaches his 100th day in office, many are taking this (admittedly arbitrary) milestone to look back and [assess](#) how he's done so far. Our take: while the administration has made some meaningful progress — withdrawing from Afghanistan, ending U.S. support for offensive operations in Yemen, and extending the New START Treaty, for example — even these steps have often lacked clarity or follow-through (how are we defining “offensive?” Are we truly ending our war in Afghanistan if airstrikes [continue](#)?). In some cases, Biden has simply reverted to the pre-Trump status quo. In others, like the Pentagon budget, he's accepted *Trump's* policies as the new baseline.

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In short: while the Biden administration pays lip service to a new foreign policy, its steps forward have fallen far short of the transformative change we need. All the more reason to keep up the fight.

BURIED LEDES

Tomorrow is May 1 — International Workers Day. In honor of the day, we're sharing two past Debriefs: [one](#) on the need for a transformed global economy that puts workers first, and the [other](#) on why *war* is a class issue.

Violence abroad begets violence at home. **This week, Win Without War released a new [activist guide to the 1033 program](#)**, which funnels military weapons from the Pentagon to police forces across the country.

The TRIPS agreement isn't the only thing wrong with the World Trade Organization. **This week, we joined over 200 organizations in [calling for a total transformation of the WTO](#)** — from an organization designed for corporate profits, to one that puts people and planet first.

We already knew the United States helped fuel the brutal Salvadoran civil war, including helping cover up the deadly El Mozote massacre. **We now know that a U.S. advisor was [present at the massacre itself](#).**

Biden's speech to Congress this week included many commendable, forward-thinking domestic plans: from infrastructure spending to a minimum wage increase. Unfortunately, **much of it was couched in unnecessary [new Cold War rhetoric](#)**. (Maybe he hasn't seen our [messaging](#)).

But things aren't all bleak: **talks on Iran deal reentry [continue](#) in Vienna, and the outlook is hopeful.**

Montana: previously first in the nation in “places I went camping but didn't get much sleep because I was afraid of bears,” now, **first in the nation to [pass](#) a state resolution against unconstitutional wars.**

And finally: **Beethoven for Bovines. Bach for bulls. [Classics for cows](#).**