The Elders urge progress on Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing Annex to secure a fair pandemic deal

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The future of the world's first Pandemic Agreement hangs in the balance. Governments have one final round of negotiations to conclude the Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) Annex before the World Health Assembly in May. Without this annex, the Agreement cannot move to the ratification stage, and the promise of a fairer global framework against future pandemics could founder after years of negotiation. Governments have both a responsibility and a public health imperative to rise to this moment and seal a deal.

Six years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep gaps and inequities in global health security. Countries of all incomes shared crucial pathogen data, but the resulting vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics either arrived too late or were priced out of reach for many.

The PABS system was conceived to correct this injustice. Any country left without access to lifesaving countermeasures makes us all less safe.

We urge governments to deliver a PABS Annex that is equitable and operational from day one. Both access and benefit-sharing obligations must be predictable and guaranteed, not left to goodwill or last-minute negotiations once a crisis has hit. Without binding arrangements, countries with the least bargaining power will be left without access again. The system should also include firm commitments which generate trust and incentivise broad participation.

Member States should be flexible to include additional negotiating days if needed to reach consensus by the current deadline.

Commitments already reached in the Pandemic Agreement should be upheld and not reopened or diluted. Transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance – with full and meaningful participation of affected communities and civil society – are important for long term success. Countries should commit to sustainably financing the PABS system – not just when a crisis hits, but long before one begins.

Finally, the multilateral architecture for pandemic preparedness and response must be protected as a collective endeavour. Bilateral arrangements are not a substitute for a shared mechanism supported by all countries which can be counted on in an emergency.

The time for action is now. We call on negotiators to work even harder to find common ground, and to deliver a robust and durable PABS system. This is essential to ensure that when the next pandemic threat strikes, the world will be ready to respond faster and more equitably than it did before.

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The Elders are independent global leaders working for peace, justice, human rights and a sustainable planet. The group was founded by Nelson Mandela in 2007.

The Elders are Gro Harlem Brundtland, Helen Clark, Elbegdorj Tsakhia, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, Hina Jilani, Denis Mukwege, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Graça Machel (Deputy Chair), Juan Manuel Santos (Chair), Mary Robinson and Ernesto Zedillo.

Ban Ki-moon, Lakhdar Brahimi, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Ricardo Lagos and Muhammad Yunus are Elders Emeritus.

Desmond Tutu (1931-2021) and Kofi Annan (1938-2018) were founding members of The Elders and served as Chairs from 2007 to 2013 and 2013 to 2018 respectively. Ela Bhatt (1933-2022) and Martti Ahtisaari (1937-2023) were members of The Elders from 2007 to 2016 and 2009 to 2018 respectively. Jimmy Carter (1924-2024) was also a founding member of The Elders.

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