

WHO, WIPO, WTO call for innovation and cooperation to support timely access to pandemic products

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The Joint Technical Symposium held on 16 December by the World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) highlighted that the world can move quickly when driven by a crisis situation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Cooperation is a key factor to foster innovation and timely equitable access to health products — for COVID-19 and in preparation for future pandemics.

WIPO Director General Daren Tang, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala opened the Symposium. They pointed out the need to leverage lessons learned during the first three years of the COVID-19 pandemic and to build on and expand the cooperation that has emerged from this health crisis.

“There is no certainty when the next pandemic will strike us, but there is absolute certainty that it will happen again. We can and must do better the next time it happens, for ourselves and our children. I hope that today’s trilateral symposium will bring us closer together and strengthen our collective will to work across the agencies, alongside our partners in the Member States, industry and civil society, to deliver a better, healthier and more sustainable outcome for our world,” said WIPO Director-General Daren Tang.

“Today’s symposium is about frank, inclusive and empirically grounded dialogue about how global trade and intellectual property rules contributed to what went well - and what did not – with the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will help lay the foundation for better responses to future global health crises,” said WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

“Despite all the gains we have made in the past three years, severe global inequities still hamper the response,” said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. “The local production of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics is key to bringing this pandemic to an end, and for strengthening preparedness for future emergencies.”

The keynote address was delivered by Mr Salim Abdool Karim, Director of the Centre for the AIDS Program of Research in South Africa and Professor of Global Health, Columbia University. He reviewed developments during the pandemic from a scientific perspective and discussed possible ways forward with regard to pandemic preparedness and response. He noted that though we have reached a widespread immunity from vaccination and natural infection which has reduced hospitalization and severe illness, the virus continues to spread, creating an ever-present risk of unpredictable new variants.

The opening was followed by two panel discussions. The first panel – moderated by Ms Anabel González, WTO Deputy Director-General – discussed the key global challenges encountered during the COVID-19 pandemic, featuring speakers from the South Centre, Africa Centres for

Disease Control and Prevention, Gilead Sciences, the International Generic and Biosimilar Medicines Association and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF).

The second panel - moderated by Ms Hanan Hassan O Balky, WHO Assistant Director-General, Access to Medicines and Health Products Division – discussed how to respond to, and recover from, the health crisis generated by COVID-19, as well as build resilience against future pandemics. Speakers represented the European Commission's Health and Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, Argentina's Ministry of Health, Indonesia's Ministry of Health, the WHO Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (WHO INB), Developing Countries Vaccines Manufacturers Network (DCVMN), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and Oxfam International.

Mr Edward Kwakwa, Assistant Director General, Global Challenges and Partnerships Sector, WIPO, summarized the day's discussions, stating that pandemic preparedness and response will depend on harnessing the innovative and creative capacities of all people. The sharing of technology and know-how, geographical diversification of manufacturing, supply chain security, smooth regulatory approval processes, pooling of procurement and financing and a balanced global IP and innovation ecosystem that helps to ensure equitable access for all to health technologies were referred to as key elements to be better prepared for future pandemics. A Trilateral Symposium does not end with joint conclusions or recommendations. It opens a forum for discussion. It enables the exchange of diverse viewpoints.

For further information about the programme, speakers and video recordings, please visit the organizations' webpages: [WHO](#), [WIPO](#) and [WTO](#).