

**Monday 16 August 2021**

**For immediate release**

**PRESS CONFERENCE: Tuesday 17 August 10:00 NY / 15:00 UK / 16:00 SA**

**Johnson & Johnson diverted South African vaccines to US and Europe during worst Covid-19 outbreak**

- **Vaccine equity campaigners in South Africa and elsewhere react to revelations in New York Times**
- **A press conference will also be held on Tuesday 17 August 2021 at 4 pm SAST to discuss the following comments in greater detail.**

*The following organisations and others will brief the media then:*

- *Health Justice Initiative (South Africa)*
- *Center for Health, Human Rights and Development/CEHURD (Uganda)*
- *Georgetown University O'Neill Institute for National & Global Health Law (USA)*
- *Oxfam (UK)*

**Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/97542720248?pwd=Rm9iamgwVXhLU00xK2VjVlJhamUxQT09>**

**Meeting ID: 975 4272 0248**

**Passcode: 930000**

Today, in an article titled [Covid Vaccines Produced in Africa Are Being Exported to Europe](#), the New York Times revealed that:

1. Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccines produced in South Africa to North America and Europe that could have helped stop the country's worst Covid-19 outbreak.
2. In exchange for even a small supply of J&J vaccines, for South Africa, the company's confidential contract, seen by the New York Times, forbids the South African government from imposing vaccine export restrictions--like those imposed in Europe--regardless of the domestic or regional need for vaccines. This prevents South Africa from taking any steps to ensure not only a sustainable supply of vaccines for South Africa, but all of Africa.

It comes as former UK prime minister Gordon Brown levelled similar allegations at J&J in [an article for The Guardian](#) based on his reported 'conversations with African leaders'.

Vaccine equity campaigners now warn that:

- Since May 2021, South Africa and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have faced a third wave with thousands of deaths that could have been prevented with accelerated vaccination access.
- Since March J&J has sent millions of vaccine doses that were 'filled and finished' in South Africa to Europe & North America.
- South Africa and the African Union had ordered 32 million and 220 million doses respectively from J&J--to be delivered mainly by Aspen Pharmaceuticals, based in South Africa, but these orders were not prioritised, while J&J shipped doses from Aspen to Europe (the AU also has an option to purchase an additional 180 million doses).
- To date J&J has delivered only a tiny supply to Africa, most of it in recent weeks. J&J has delivered only about 6 million of the 400 million ordered by the AU and has stated that it can only deliver up to 50 million of that contract by **end 2021**.
- The diversion of supplies from South Africa, also undermined and delayed vaccination programmes for the elderly, and other vulnerable groups in South Africa, particularly in rural areas, forcing the country to rely on small-batch donations from J&J of doses that were close to their expiry dates. Even to date, J&J supplies are about a quarter of what Pfizer has delivered for South Africa.
- **J&J's confidential contract with the SA government forces South Africa to allow unrestricted exports of vaccines produced under a separate agreement with Aspen Pharmacare--a restriction of sovereign authority that the United States, European Union, and others were not required to sign to get doses.**
- Africa currently has a vaccination rate of less than 3%, compared to Europe with 53%.

**Fatima Hassan, Executive Director of the [Health Justice Initiative](#), said:**

*“J&J is holding South Africa and Africa to ransom, forcibly exporting doses filled and finished here, while our people die by the thousands. It’s horrifying to see that our government was seemingly forced to sign up to this kind of exploitation in return for 32 million vaccines here, because this also affects the timely supply of at least 200 million vaccine doses for Africa from Aspen, which J&J clearly fully controls - this much-touted license gives Aspen no supply control whatsoever. Aspen is also the only supplier for Africa - this is nonsensical and dangerous in a pandemic. It is time that all secret vaccine contracts with vaccine manufacturers and distributors are published and reviewed - we have a right to know what has been agreed in our name.*”

*“In our view, J&J are complicit in vaccine apartheid, diverting doses from those who really need them to the wealthiest countries on earth. It’s colonialist extraction, plain and simple.”*

**Mohga Kamal-Yanni, Senior health policy advisor to the [Peoples Vaccine Alliance](#), said:**

*“While South Africa was experiencing one of the worst humanitarian crises to arise from Covid-19, J&J diverted desperately needed vaccines to wealthy countries. It’s utterly abhorrent and shows a total disregard for African life. This is further proof that the world cannot trust a handful of pharmaceutical companies to fairly allocate vaccines across the world. Pharma executives seem all too happy to write off African deaths to line their own pockets.*”

*“Without urgent action, more of these tragedies could be around the corner. It is time for governments to break pharmaceutical companies’ monopolies on knowledge and technology of vaccines and other tools to deal with COVID-19. We should develop domestic manufacturing in low-and-middle-income countries, not siphon off doses to the rich world.”*

**Dr. Matthew Kavanagh, [Georgetown University, O’Neill Institute for National & Global Health Law](#), said:**

*“Global allocation of vaccines is currently not being made by public health officials but instead by a handful of company officials, who consistently prioritise Europeans and North Americans over Africans. This NYT article makes clear that these choices will keep being made, costing lives and prolonging this pandemic.*”

*“The Biden Administration and others have the power to change this power imbalance by using their legal and political power to compel companies to share the know-how to make vaccines so that companies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America can produce for their populations. There is huge capacity in low- and middle-income countries and funding available to produce the world’s best vaccines--but the missing piece is the knowledge. If there were multiple licenses and technology transfer to expert producers in the global South, we would not be seeing the outrageous level of inequity we see today.”*

**Ends**

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**Notes:**

- *4.7bn vaccines have been distributed globally: about 80% have gone to wealthier G20 countries.*
- *Low-income countries have administered only 1.5 doses per 100 people.*
- *496m vaccines have been administered across the European Union, which has a population of roughly 440 million people while 77.3m doses have been administered in Africa with a population of approximately 1.3 billion people.*
- *The World Health Organization (WHO) now predicts that 47 of Africa’s 54 countries will not reach a September 2021 target of vaccinating even at least 10% of people living there. In Burundi, not a single vaccine has yet been administered*