

# COVID-19

## Virtual Press conference

### 1 April 2021

#### Speaker key:

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MS	Dr Mariangela Simao
MA	Mariella
BA	Dr Bruce Aylward
CA	Catherine

#### 00:00:49

CL Good day. Hello and welcome, wherever you are listening to us today. It is Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. My name is Christian Lindmeier and I'm welcoming you to today's global COVID-19 press conference with a special focus on the impact of COVID-19, the success of the ACT Accelerator and the work needed to support equity, especially for the health workforce.

For this we welcome two special guest today; first Dr Fahrettin Koca, Minister of Health from the Republic of Turkey, who is actively supporting the International Year of Health and Care Workers; and Carl Bildt, former Prime Minister of Sweden and recently named WHO Special Envoy for the ACT Accelerator.

Simultaneous translation is provided in the six official languages, Arabic, Chinese, French, English, Spanish and Russian as well as Portuguese and Hindi. When we get to hear from Ankara we will have Turkish and then English consecutive translation. Now let me introduce the panel in the room.

Present are Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, Dr Mike Ryan, Executive Director of the Health Emergencies Programme of WHO, Dr Maria Van Kerkhove, the Technical Lead on COVID-19, Dr Mariangela Simao, Assistant Director-General, Access to Medicines and Health Products, Dr Bruce Aylward, Special Advisor to the Director-General and the Lead on the ACT Accelerator, Dr Kate O'Brien, the Director for Immunisation, Vaccines and Biologicals and last but not least, Dr Jim Kempel, the Director for Health Workforce.

**00:02:38**

With this let me hand over to the Director-General for the opening remarks and to welcome our guest. Director-General, the floor is yours.

TAG Thank you. Thank you, Christian. Good morning, good afternoon and good evening. This week more than 25 leaders from the G20, G7 and from every region united behind the idea of a pandemic treaty. There is an acknowledgement and humility from those leaders that collectively the world was not prepared for the first coronavirus pandemic ever seen and that going forward we must collectively do better in future outbreaks.

There has been a great deal of momentum since the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and I spoke about this at yesterday's press conference. I am pleased that more leaders are now joining the call for a pandemic treaty which would be a generational commitment to keeping the world safe.

**00:03:46**

There will always be new pathogens with pandemic potential. It's not a matter of if but when. One key aspect that could be enshrined in the treaty is to... a stronger health workforce which is the very essence of health systems' resilience.

An effective health workforce is the key element to pandemic-proofing our health systems. Health and care workers are at the forefront of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and they play the critical role in protecting us all.

Far too many health and care workers have died in the pandemic. Millions have been infected and the pandemic has

taken a huge toll on their physical and mental health with devastating effects on their families and communities. Anxiety, depression, insomnia and stress have all increased. Exhaustion is commonplace and there have been cases of stigma and even abuse.

I give thanks to those that have stood up in one of humanity's toughest periods. This is the year of the health and care worker and we know that even before the pandemic there was a shortfall of at least 18 million health workers and we work to end the pandemic and recover together. Health and care workers must come first. We must make sure that they're trained, protected and supported to do their job safely and effectively.

### **00:05:40**

As recognised in last week's UN financing for sustainable development report a true recovery from the pandemic requires additional investment in health and in people. These two priorities can be achieved if we invest in the health workforce.

Investing in the health workforce is an investment in women and youth. Almost 70% of the global health workforce are women. In particular we must support countries with fewer resources to expand their workforce capacity and pay decent salaries and we must ensure that they are at the front of the line for COVID-19 vaccines.

I would now like to turn to Health Minister of Turkey, Dr Fahrettin Koca. Turkey has been a strong champion of 2021 being the year of the health and care workforce. Dr Koca, the floor is yours.

FK [Turkish language].

TR Distinguished Director-General, Mr Prime Minister and distinguished participants, COVID-19, which has been a part of our lives for over a year, is the biggest pandemic that the entire world has fought against within the past 100 years. This disease has not only been a health threat but it has also affected our lives in many ways.

### **00:08:32**

Since day one of the pandemic each and every country has been putting up a fight against it within the bounds of their healthcare capacities. Although the methods adopted by countries vary the whole world has become more aware of an idea about the importance of healthcare workers in our lives. This powerful idea has led to the birth of a new set of ethics for healthcare workers.

To elaborate, I would like to refer to a principle from the fourth century BC from the Hippocratic Oath which reads, *primum non nocere*. In Turkey and in other countries people have witnessed one thing; healthcare workers whose main principle is not to harm the patient, embrace the possibility that they can be harmed themselves.

It is this testimony that is the foundation of the new set of ethics that is beginning to develop and this is the very testimony that has improved the status of healthcare workers and societies. The heroes of these times when people seek trust in fear are healthcare workers.

### **00:11:41**

There is another factor in the background for this newly emerging ethics. Before the pandemic healthcare was between the individual and the healthcare worker. However with the pandemic this relationship morphed into a broader and more encompassing one.

In line with all of this we are aware of the fact that societies are willing to take healthcare workers to a higher position. What decision-makers will do for healthcare workers is what societies demand.

Distinguished participants, Turkey's response to the pandemic is well-known both to our people and the world and we have been taking strength from our well-trained, equipped, dedicated and selfless healthcare workforce.

We all know that when the need arises healthcare workers rush to the fronts by the very nature of their profession. This pandemic has been the proof of this. While they perform their work various roles and duties fall upon the rest of society and on the decision-makers.

### **00:13:59**

Societies that can adopt necessary policies bearing in mind this responsibility will be able to offer great support to boost the morale and motivation of healthcare workers and to relieve their burden.

As a demonstration of this understanding we have introduced and implemented timely and effective policies in a variety of issues such as supplying high-quality and sufficient protective equipment, offering timely and science-based information about current developments and providing socio-economic and moral support.

Alleviating the burden on healthcare workers by employing new people has been a priority for us. Another priority has been to take measures to improve the productivity of healthcare workers such as redefining and redistributing roles and responsibilities and delaying non-urgent procedures.

Of course none of these steps can make up for the selfless efforts of our healthcare workers. Their selfless efforts should definitely go down in history. Societies are aware of the need to honour such work. This is the very motivation behind the idea of declaring 2021 the international year of health and care workers, for which we have been a strong advocate since day one.

### **00:17:59**

Esteemed participants, Mr Director-General has posted about a very important issue recently, noting that healthcare workers had saved the world and it was now the world's responsibility to protect them. He underlined that health and care workers around the world should have access to a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.

I support this call wholeheartedly. With this understanding I have to note that we have completed vaccinating one million healthcare workers in our country in only 45 days. Even though we have yet to produce our own vaccine I would like to note that we have shared a portion of the vaccines we have supplied with other countries to be delivered to healthcare workers.

We have another responsibility which is to ardently advocate for the access of healthcare workers to vaccines. As Turkey we have taken on a facilitating role by building diplomatic bridges between vaccine-producing countries and those having problems accessing them.

### **00:20:11**

I am glad to say that we have achieved concrete results out of these initiatives. Distinguished Director-General, I would like to also highlight that our own vaccine production efforts are still ongoing at full speed. We believe that we will soon be producing our own vaccine and when that happens rest assured that your call on vaccine-producing countries will be met with a clear response in Turkey.

Distinguished participants, not only one single day but the whole year of 2021 has been dedicated to health and care workers. Many activities will be held on this occasion throughout the year.

We are committed to making the most active contribution to these events.

We will continue to advocate for the process through ideas, projects and events on international platforms, especially the platforms of the United Nations. Together we will mobilise the sense of duty and gratitude of the whole world. We will try to further improve the status of healthcare workers, the status of their professions as required by our ethical responsibilities.

Stories of heroism are being told from large cities to the most remote corners of the world in hundreds of different languages. These stories are now needed to be told in the common language of humanity.

### **00:23:29**

The battle against the pandemic is also fought in uniforms. These uniforms bring out compassion in people and right now is the time when we should write down history.

For this purpose as a first step we are working on creating a digital platform with WHO to serve as a memorial dedicated to health and care workers. Tedros, my dear friend, I expect your personal support for this platform.

As I conclude I would like to give the following message to all healthcare workers around the world. The whole of humanity is grateful to you right now and humanity will find the best way to express this gratitude. Thank you.

TAG Thank you. Thank you so much, Your Excellency, Dr Koca. I'm glad that vaccines are rolling out to health workers in this difficult period in the pandemic and look forward to working with you closely. Thank you so much. Teşekkür.

### **00:25:28**

The clock is still ticking on vaccine equity. We have nine days left until we reach the 100<sup>th</sup> day of the year and the target of starting vaccine roll-out to health workers and those at risk in all countries remains in our grasp.

COVAX has already delivered 35 million doses to more than 78 countries but there is still a serious challenge on vaccine equity and availability. Last week I made an urgent request to countries with doses of vaccines that have WHO emergency listing to share ten million doses immediately with COVAX.

The extra ten million doses will be an urgent stopgap measure so that 20 countries which are ready but haven't got the supply

needed to start vaccinating their health workers and older people could begin before the 100<sup>th</sup> day, 10<sup>th</sup> April.

I also requested manufacturers help ensure that the countries that step up can rapidly donate those doses. This challenge has been heard but we've yet to receive commitments for these doses. I'm still hopeful that some forward-looking and enlightened leaders will step up.

I know this is a challenging time for many countries as cases and hospitalisations are spiking but conversely it's when cases are spiking that it's the most important time to share vaccines equitably and protect health workers and at-risk communities.

The race is on to get vaccines to those places and groups where they can have the greatest impact. We're not in a race against each other. We are in a race against the virus and over the last year the ACT Accelerator has been critical for ensuring that new vaccines, life-saving oxygen, corticosteroids for severe disease and rapid tests are being shared more equitably.

Today I'm happy to welcome former Prime Minister of Sweden, Carl Bildt, who I appointed as WHO Special Envoy to the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator. Carl will help lead the collective advocacy for the ACT Accelerator, mobilising support and critical resources so it can deliver against its strategy for 2021. My friend, Carl, the floor is yours. Tack så mycket for joining us.

CB Thank you, Director-General. I have to start by saying I'm honoured and I'm humbled by the fact you have appointed me Special Envoy to start working with the ACT Accelerator. I am thoroughly impressed with what has been achieved in an absolutely unique situation where we have a global challenge of a magnitude that we haven't seen in living memory anyhow if we look at how things are.

**00:29:02**

I think the ACT Accelerator has been a critical instrument in mobilising resources and in co-ordinating the activities of a very diverse set of actors. Without that co-ordination mechanism I doubt that what has been achieved would have been possible to achieve.

Then of course we're all in a situation where we would like everything to be done by now in terms of vaccines, [unclear], treatments, and whatever but we are in a phase where efforts are in a phase of acceleration all over the world. I'm convinced

that everyone is doing their very best to make this as fast and as secure and as safe as is possible.

I hope that I can make my contribution to this work as well. I'm certainly not a medical expert; no-one expects me to have any firm views on that but I have a fair amount of experience on working in politics and working in the international community, trying to get the different parts of that wide community to work towards the same goal.

**00:30:11**

I think that is of course more important now than on perhaps any other of the global challenges that we have been seeing during the last few decades.

Lots on the agenda; mobilising resources, distributing vaccines, as the Director-General mentioned; COVAX, the ramping-up of production and all of that but also mobilising resources. We still have a funding gap with the ACT Accelerator different efforts [?] in the order of \$22 billion. That's a fair amount of money but if you compare it with the amount of money that the government are spending - rightly so - in order to sustain their economies it's less than 1% of that money.

We know of course that if we don't get the pandemic under control that money's not going to be enough so I hope it will be possible to mobilise that money. It's an effort with the co-chairs of the facilitation council, Norway and South Africa being very active but I hope I can make my contribution to that as well.

I leave the Director-General with that; much ahead; I look forward to it. It's a task that is, mildly speaking, urgent and all efforts by everyone are welcome.

**00:31:38**

CL Thank you. Thank you so much indeed and thank you for your inspiring words and look forward to working with you very closely. I couldn't agree more and believe that with your support we can take the ACT Accelerator to the next level, overcome vaccine nationalism so that we defeat this pandemic and recover together. Tack så myckete again. Christian, back to you.

CL Thank you very much, Dr Tedros. Let me now open the floor to questions from the media. We have a long list already and therefore I ask you to only ask one question at a time. We'll start with Bayram Ayturk from Anadolu agency. Bayram, in case you want to ask in Turkish I would ask you to please also immediately after ask your question in English to make it easier

for us here. Thank you very much. Bayram, please unmute yourself.

BA Can you hear me? Hello, Christian.

CL Yes. Go ahead, please.

BA Thank you for taking my question. I'll ask my question in English. My question is for the Minister of Health of the Republic of Turkey. Mr Koca, Director-General Dr Tedros has spoken many times of the importance of having solidarity across the world in using resources to fight the COVID pandemic. How do you assess Turkey's contribution to this process and what has its contribution been to the world?

**00:33:15**

Also Turkey is a leading country giving priority to vaccinating health workers so can you comment on where Turkey is regarding the production of vaccines and supply of vaccines? Thank you.

CL Thank you very much. Your Excellency, Dr Koca, please. Your Excellency, Dr Koca, could I ask you to reply.

TR [Turkish language].

FK [Turkish language].

TR Thank you for the question. Yes, as you have mentioned, Mr Director-General has stressed many, many times since the start of the pandemic the importance of solidarity and international co-operation.

**00:37:50**

In that regard I would like to say that Turkey has supported 158 countries with personal protective equipment, diagnostic kits and ventilators. Also we have cooperated very closely with 14 international organisations including the WHO and I myself personally held meetings with the Ministers of Health of 20 countries throughout this period.

Also we have a COVID-19 scientific board here in Turkey and they have shared their experiences with experts of 13 countries. So in terms of your question about the vaccine, we have 18 vaccines right now that are in WHO's list and one of these vaccines is in phase two right now and we will proceed to phase three in about a month. This is an inactive vaccine, by the way.

Also we have four vaccines that are currently in phase one and we believe that by August or September we will have the first vaccine complete and ready. Our President has also sent a clear message. He said that more than 1,000 countries have yet to have access to a COVID-19 vaccine. That's why he said that when Turkey is able to produce its own vaccine that vaccine will definitely be offered for the use of the whole of humanity.

Right now 100 countries do not have access to a COVID-19 vaccine, which is why the vaccine to be produced in Turkey will be offered for the whole of humanity. By the way, we will also work on not only the inactive vaccine but also mRNA vaccines, virus particulate-based vaccine and also we are working on an intranasal vaccine which will be in phase two in two to three weeks. Thank you.

**00:40:15**

CL Thank you very much, Your Excellency. Let me move to the next question from Gunila Van Hal, Svenska Dagblad. Gunila, please unmute yourself.

GU Can you hear me?

CL Very well. Go ahead.

GU Thank you. Thanks for taking my question. It is to Carl Bildt and it is about access to vaccine. WHO is urging governments to share excess vaccine doses with low-income countries in need once their own risk groups have been vaccinated. How do you think this could be perceived as reasonable and motivated in countries like Sweden and others that have waited for a long time to get vaccines at all and where many people below 65 are waiting to be vaccinated?

**00:41:03**

If I may just squeeze in one short question to you, how are you going to convince countries to contribute more to the ACT Accelerator? Thanks.

CL Mr Bildt, can I invite you.

CB Yes, two questions. Certainly first the money, as I said, a huge amount of money but if you compare it with the money that is now spent on sustaining economic recovery it's really a very limited amount; it's less than 1% of the stimulus money that is available, be that in the US or in the EU, to take those two big ones.

Of course most of this money, although we would like everyone to contribute, will have to come from the major rich countries. So lots of money but if you compare it with the other money that we were forced to spend as a result of the pandemic not very much.

Second question, yes; I don't need to tell this to you, I've been in politics for some time and I can see the pressures that every political leader, every prime minister; every health minister is under pressure in every country because everyone wants to have the vaccine and wants to have the vaccine yesterday.

**00:42:19**

But I think it's very important also that they all are ready to take the broader perspective, that they really understand that no-one is really safe until everyone is safe and we have a self-interest, be that in Sweden or the United States or India or Portugal or South Korea, that the pandemic is brought under control because the risk is, as we know, that otherwise we might get new mutations, new variations which might even undo what we have already done.

If I look at the figures of course the EU has been exporting quite a lot during the past few months, which I think has been positive if I take it only from the EU perspective that you ask about.

CL Thank you very much, Mr Bildt. We'll now move to the next and that's Nina Larson from AFP. Nina, please unmute yourself.

NI Hi, can you hear me?

CL Very well.

NI Great. Thank you for taking my question. I have a question for Dr Tedros. In your briefing to member states about the origins report earlier this week you said it was a very important beginning but not the end. Has it been agreed that the next phase in this process also must involve investigations in China and when do you think this phase two could get underway?

Have you had talks with Beijing about a fresh international expert mission to the country? Thank you.

CL Dr Tedros, please.

TAG Thank you very much for that question. Of course there are many recommendations made by the team from the report - I hope you have read the report so there will be follow-up assessments - so that's what we expect but we haven't yet

discussed because the report was just released last Tuesday. We will start engagements as soon as possible. Thank you.

CL Thank you very much, Director-General. Now we'll move to Sara Teofilo from Cabreo Brasiliense. Sara, please unmute yourself.

SA Hi. Thank you for taking my question. In Brazil we're seeing our worst moment in the epidemic. Yesterday we had more than 3,800 people killed by COVID, which was a record. States and cities have implemented some restrictive measures in recent weeks, which were widely criticised by our President but many have already backed down and as we all know, we are the second country in total number of victims of COVID. Knowing that we have a slow pace of vaccinations because we don't have enough vaccines, what results should we expect if aggressive measures are not taken?

**00:45:19**

Are we going to have more people killed by COVID than the US and how could international organisations and governments help Brazil with vaccines and medicines? Thank you.

CL Dr Van Kerkhove, please.

MK Yes, I will start and then I'm sure others will come in. There was a very important live Q&A that occurred earlier this week with Dr Mariangela Simao and others in Portuguese so I do encourage you to look at that if you haven't had a chance to talk about the situation.

Indeed there's a very serious situation going on in Brazil right now where we have a number of states that are in critical condition. I understand that the Brazilian Ministry of Health has stated that six states are in critical condition and nationwide the hospitals are overwhelmed with most ICUs are over 90% capacity.

**00:46:14**

We're aware of a recent survey that was carried out by the National Council of Health Secretaries finding that more than 6,000 people were waiting for an ICU bed, 6,000 people with COVID-19 waiting for an ICU bed so indeed there is a critical situation there.

The challenges are many in terms of increased transmissibility with this P1 variant that has been detected, that is circulating in the country. If you have increased transmission or a more

transmissible virus you'll have more cases, which can overwhelm a health system that is already overwhelmed.

Our regional office in PAHO with our country office are working with the states, working with the country to make sure that they have the right provisions in place to be able to care for patients, to get oxygen in, to provide the support that is necessary but indeed it is a critical situation.

We do know that with this P1 variant that it is predominant in about 13 states, I think it's about 13 states as of right now and we do see that hospitalisations and ICU are increasing across all age groups, including younger age groups between 20 and 60 years old requiring hospitalisation and also ICU so there's a lot underway.

**00:47:32**

I do know that vaccination is increasing so someone else may want to comment on the proportion of the population that is receiving vaccination because I don't have those latest numbers there.

I'll pass to Mariangela but it is important that the measures that are in place include vaccination. We still need to make sure that the public health and social measures, the distancing, the mask-wearing, the hand hygiene and making sure when you do wear a mask that you wear a mask with clean hands, that you touch the mask, you put it on, you take it off, you wash it, you dispose of it if it's a single-use mask appropriately, that you avoid crowded spaces, you limit the number of contacts that you have, try to just mix with the individuals within your household.

All of those measures, I know, are incredibly difficult to still adhere to 16 months into a pandemic when everybody is exhausted but those measures are still in place in addition to vaccination. Mariangela, maybe you want to comment on the vaccination.

**00:48:33**

MS Thank you. I'm going to speak in Portuguese.

TR Thank you very much for the questions and of course the WHO is very concerned with what is going on in Brazil. On the one hand the local production of vaccines is very important right now in Brazil. Despite the fact that Brazil is receiving vaccines through the COVAX facility Brazil can actually create its own vaccines and produce them via Butanta and Fia Cruz [?]. This is

essential right now considering the pressure that is being put on supplies of vaccine.

I wanted to just support what was said by Dr Maria Van Kerkhove. We need to not just be placing all our bets on the availability of vaccines. Even when there is greater vaccine coverage it is also very important that the authorities say that it is necessary to still stick to prevention measures such as avoiding crowded spaces, using masks, hand washing.

That means that it is very important that we do not fall into a false sense of security regarding the quantity of vaccines. I think right now healthcare professionals and those over the age of 68 have now started being vaccinated.

**00:50:18**

Nonetheless it is right now when there is high transmission that we need to continue to be very vigilant, especially in urban centres. Thank you.

CL Thank you very much both. Let me move to Mariella Skukta from [Unclear] TV, Albania. Mariella, please unmute yourself.

MA Hello, everyone.

CL Please go ahead.

MA First of all I want to start by saying thank you for always being so professional and answering all of our concerns. I know this might sound a bit bizarre but on 5<sup>th</sup> April Albania will be going into the parliamentary elections and our Prime Minister, Edi Rama, has often stated that if the opposition wins the election the Albanian citizens will no longer have access to vaccine.

As I said, it sounds bizarre but the general public might be concerned about this statement being true so my question is, is the statement true or false? Will or will not the Albanian citizens have access to vaccines in the case of the opposition winning the election? Thank you very much.

**00:51:42**

CL Thank you very much, Mariella. I don't think we can give a political answer here but I could ask Dr Aylward if there's anything about vaccine supply in general through COVAX.

BA Thank you, Christian. The question just reinforces the importance of ensuring all peoples everywhere have access to vaccination, especially healthcare workers, as we heard from His

Excellency, the Minister from Turkey today and others, the Director-General, and then of course the older population and then onward through the high-risk populations.

The goal of the COVAX facility of which Albania and others are members is to ensure that all countries and all populations have access. That is the key to getting out of this irrespective of the situation or circumstances of an individual country or economy.

CL Thank you very much, Dr Aylward. We move to Catherine Fiancon of France 24. Catherine, please unmute yourself.

**00:52:47**

CA Thank you, Christian. Good afternoon to all of you. I have a question about treatments. At the beginning of the pandemic we spoke a lot about treatments and vaccines but during the conferences we don't talk a lot about treatments so I would like to know a bit about that, particularly about preventive nasal treatments.

There are some products that have been manufactured by Israel and Canada. What is your opinion about that, is it useful? Thank you.

CL Thank you very much, Catherine. I have Dr Van Kerkhove to start.

MK I can give a general answer to that and in fact Mike and I did a live yesterday where we were asked quite a lot about treatments because there is much more work that needs to be done on treatments for COVID-19.

We do have the dexamethasone for patients who are severe and critical. This saves lives and we know that there are other measures that can be put in place that save lives so first of all it's prevention.

**00:53:52**

Secondly if people are ill that they enter the clinical care pathway early so that they receive the appropriate care depending on the severity of their illness, that they have their oxygen saturation checked, that they receive oxygen. Oxygen saves lives and WHO with partners has been working around the world to ensure that oxygen reaches countries around the world so that patients can receive this life-saving care.

There are a number of therapeutics that are in developing looking at early-stage treatment. More work needs to be done in this area, there's no question about that. Our clinical teams are

evaluating the studies that are coming out through these clinical trials and as the data come out they will be able to make recommendations as the data allow in terms of enough numbers and results so that they can activate the system to start to pool together the data from all of the clinical trials so that we have enough cases to be able to assess their efficacy. So that is something that is underway.

CL Dr Aylward, please, to add.

BA Thank you, Chris, and further to the point that was just made by Maria, the question is so valuable because the reality is we don't talk enough about treatments and what can be done for people suffering with COVID and particularly severe COVID-19.

**00:55:19**

Because, as Maria highlighted, dexamethasone is now available, saves lives combined with oxygen can have a tremendous impact and these simple interventions, we're learning more and more, are not available in enough places to be able to ensure the maximum impact.

So as we talked about a couple of weeks ago with the launch of the new strategy for the ACT Accelerator for 2021, a huge part of the emphasis will be on not only ensuring that the vaccines are getting out there and getting to all populations but that we're also getting the rapid diagnostic tests out there to guide treatments and of course we're getting the oxygen and the dexamethasone.

So just a thank you for the question because the reality is we do not talk enough about some very simple, relatively inexpensive and certainly unaffordable interventions that could make a huge difference for people suffering severe disease.

**00:56:14**

CL Thank you very much both. With this we've come to the end of our question-and-answer session. I would like to invite our special guests to give their closing remarks and we of course would like to start with His Excellency, Dr Fahrettin Koca, Minister of Health of the Republic of Turkey. The floor is yours, sir.

FK [Turkish language].

TR Thank you very much. I believe that in terms of access to vaccines the world is faced with a very difficult condition and an obstacle so I think we should be able to produce vaccines everywhere, all over the world without intellectual property rights

being a problem. That's why I think we need to be taking concrete steps about this issue. Thank you very much for your attention.

CL Thank you very much for these remarks. I'll ask Carl Bildt, the former Prime Minister of Sweden and now WHO Special Envoy for the ACT Accelerator, for his comments.

CB Yes, I can only say related to the question that was coming in from Albania related to the election campaign that is underway there that I think we all recognise that this is a race; humanity versus the virus.

**00:58:16**

We live in a world where there are a lot of political tensions between different countries and certainly within countries between different political parties, be there elections or not. But this is a time when these things should be put aside and the fight against COVID should be above all of this and should not be used for political purposes, be that a political purpose of an external nature, foreign policy or be that of a domestic nature, one way or the other. This is all of us, humanity versus the virus and it's important that it's seen in that context.

CL Thank you so much, Carl Bildt, for these words. Before I hand to Dr Tedros for the final remarks thank you all for the participation. We will be sending the audio file and the remarks of our special guests and Dr Tedros right after the press conference. The full transcript will be posted on the WHO website tomorrow morning. Any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact [mediaenquiries@who.int](mailto:mediaenquiries@who.int)

With this, Dr Tedros, the floor is yours.

**00:59:27**

TAG Thank you. Thank you so much. I fully agree with what former Prime Minister Carl Bildt said on this virus; the most important weapon is national unity and global solidarity. We have been saying this for a long time and I fully agree with him that this fight is humanity against the virus, directly quoting him of course.

So any country should actually unite around the fight against this virus. Any divisions or cracks between us will only give opportunity to the virus.

Then to what the Minister said I fully agree; local production is very, very important and WHO is ready to help countries. I think

going forward the vaccine equity could be addressed by increasing local and regional capacity in production and we have been calling also for intellectual property waivers to help expand the production capacity significantly.

With that, thank you so much to our guests, thank you for joining us today and also thank you to the media members for joining us. I look forward to seeing you next week. Happy Easter and also have a nice weekend. Thank you so much.

**01:01:06**