

Sustainable Health Equity Movement (SHEM)
Statement to the 74th World Health Assembly, 2021

*Sustainable worldwide collaboration to respond to
ongoing inequities and health emergencies*

The COVID-19 pandemic—being the ultimate result of an unsustainable relationship between our societies’ economic growth, our environment, and the majority of the world’s population—has heightened a wide array of social and health inequities worldwide.

The global interconnectedness of all living beings, highlighted by the pandemic, reinforces the need to think beyond the boundaries of our national borders. While politics led by short-sighted economic and nationalist decisions can benefit a few and decimate the lives of millions of others, the pandemic has also given us momentum for global responsibility and the duty to cooperate internationally to eliminate the unequal relations that have historically characterized global dynamics.

To bring the pandemic to an end, we need to consider COVID-19 immunization a global public good, implement a strategy to produce vaccines at larger volumes, distribute them equitably between countries, and provide them at no cost to the user. Without an equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines between countries, the world economy will not recover—perpetuating human suffering and premature mortality.

We can achieve these goals by waiving intellectual property rights to vaccines, tests, and treatments related to COVID-19, openly sharing and transferring the vaccines’ technology and intellectual property through the World Health Organization (WHO), fully funding COVAX, overcoming vaccine nationalism, and investing in WHO efforts and in the strengthening of national health systems.

We applaud the multiple declarations in defense of equitable access to vaccines. However, we believe that we must take urgent actions to make these noble intentions a reality. An intellectual property rights waiver and technology transfer would represent a bold step in the right direction towards a future where the dignity of millions of human lives is worth more than the financial gains of a few.