

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
United States Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power,

We write today as a follow-up to a briefing we recently received in the House Foreign Affairs Committee on COVID-19 Assistance and Diplomacy. Based on our conversation in that briefing, we urge you to ensure that a robust network for vaccine distribution exists among our allies and partners around the world.

We are all familiar with the devastating human toll brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. In the United States alone, we have lost more than 580,000 of our friends and loved ones. For more than a year, life as we knew it has been completely upended, causing widespread economic hardship and uncertainty about the future. Fortunately, thanks to the robust response offered by the Biden Administration, the caseload in the United States continues to decrease, millions of Americans have been vaccinated, and while the crisis certainly isn't over, we now have reason to hope that maybe much of the worst is behind us.

Unfortunately, this is not true for the rest of the world. While more than 30% of the United States population has been fully vaccinated, roughly 90% of the world's population has not. In recent weeks, India has experienced a truly horrifying surge in COVID-19 cases with the World Health Organization (WHO) warning that a new variant could be even more deadly.¹ Australia has done an excellent job of keeping infection rates low but is far behind in vaccination rates, with only about 5.4% of the population vaccinated to date². We continue to see high caseloads in Latvia and Croatia and full vaccination rates of less than 10%. In some parts of the Caribbean, the vaccination rate in some countries is less than 1% of the total population. Finally, while South Korea has seen a steady decrease in their caseloads, their vaccination rate remains alarmingly low, at 1.3%.³

These numbers represent more than just a devastating level of human suffering and loss of life. They also present an opportunity for malign actors like Russia and China to engage in vaccine diplomacy and take advantage of United States allies in their most desperate hours of need. Notably, China recently offered a shipment of their Sinovac vaccine in exchange for Paraguay

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/05/11/world/covid-vaccine-coronavirus-cases/the-who-warns-that-a-variant-in-india-could-be-highly-contagious>

² <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/australia/>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html>

cutting off diplomatic support for Taiwan.⁴ Russia is likewise providing their Sputnik V vaccine to countries in the European Union, South America, and the Middle East, who feel they have nowhere else to turn.

The United States can and must do a better job ensuring that our allies and partners know the United States is willing to help. With our decreasing caseload and increasing numbers of vaccinated Americans, states are beginning to refuse additional shipments of vaccines. We understand the importance of ensuring we have an adequate supply to keep Americans safe, but once we have that secured, there is no reason why we shouldn't be engaging in more proactive outreach to assist the rest of the world and be a leader in promoting global health security.

To that end, we ask the Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to communicate clearly to our allies and partners that we are ready to quickly provide vaccine supplies, including unused AstraZeneca vaccines. We urge you to work with the necessary agencies and international organizations to ensure that we have a network capable of supporting that commitment, and that this network prioritizes distribution to areas of greatest need. We stand ready to support this effort in Congress and ask that you update us on your progress in developing this network and finalizing distribution plans.

Pandemics do not respect borders. Viruses like COVID-19 pay no attention to political leanings or international alliances. If we ever hope to defeat this pandemic, the United States must reassert itself as the leader on vaccine distribution and ensure that countries get the assistance they need. We look forward to working with you on this effort.

Sincerely,




Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Ted Lieu
Member of Congress

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/world/americas/paraguay-china-vaccine-diplomacy.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>

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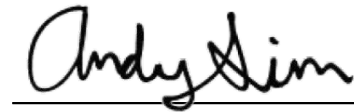
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