**Nigeria’s response to the call for contributions ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic**

Nigeria welcomes the resolution 46/14 adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council on ensuring, affordable, timely, universal and equitable access for all countries, to vaccines in response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

2. Nigeria notes that the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every human, regardless of where they were born, where they live and work as spelt out in the WHO Constitution (1946).

3. Nigeria invites countries to note the changing nature of disease epidemiology, making control less dependent on country focused approaches, but on global solidarity and cooperation. No Nation can successfully contain a pandemic by itself without recourse to resources and support from those in their vicinity and beyond.

4. Nigeria welcomes the intervention of the United Nations Human Rights Commission on access to vaccines, and recognize the unique place of the UN and the UNHRC in dealing with intricate problems associated with access to vaccines, especially since resolving international problems of economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character, and promoting and encouraging respect for human rights, are part of the thrusts of the United Nations.

5. The world should note that human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, therefore, no country should be content till all countries have also attained a measure of protection of fundamental rights of their people, including the right to health. Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access of all countries to vaccines in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is a critical part of this.

6. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a litmus test on inequities and inequalities between the Global North and South. The disparities are reflected in the difference in the proportion of persons vaccinated in developed countries versus that in developing countries.

7. Since declaration of the pandemic, life-saving, innovative interventions have been concentrated in high-income countries, while low-income countries have struggled to gain access to consumables and still lag behind in access to COVID-19 vaccines. This disparity only serves to prevent and slow down control of COVID as a global health problem, which is counterproductive.

8. As some countries embrace vaccine nationalism, global public health solidarity will be sacrificed in its place, whereas, it should be recognized that global response be based on unity, solidarity and multilateral cooperation, as key to achieving a world where everyone is safe from dangers associated with the pandemic.

9. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217 A) as a common standard of achievements for all peoples, has been tested and impacted by poor access to vaccines. The specifics are detailed in paragraph 10 below:

10. The human right implications and vulnerabilities occasioned by the lack of affordable, timely, equitable and universal access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in Nigeria cut across some of the articles of the Universal declaration of Human Rights. Specifically, these impact on article 1, 2, 3, 5, 13, 16, 23, 25, and 26 as highlighted below:

**Article I**

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

* *The lack of affordable, timely, equitable and universal access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines clearly violates the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity intended in article 1 of the UDHR. Developing countries have struggled, even with their own finances, to secure vaccines and commodities for the maintenance of optimal and dignified health care for our people. The combination of political and economic hurdles on our paths, undermines the ability of developing countries to give unfettered and dignified access to vaccines.*

**Article 2**

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

* *The lack of affordable, timely, equitable and universal access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, in developing countries as compared to developed countries, is an indication of a distinction made on the basis of political, national, social origin, and international status of countries. A clear difference between those classified economically as developed and developing. The implication of this is that developed countries have inadvertently discriminated against countries in the global south and her people.*

**Article 3**

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of person.

* *The right to life, liberty and security is in jeopardy to persons who live in developing countries due to inequities in vaccine distribution. Developing countries will not be able to attain herd immunity at the same rate as their ‘counterparts’ in more developed countries. The implication for our people is that control efforts and associated publich health expenditure will last longer, with associated deaths and lives lost to disability from COVID-19. While the developed countries continue to risk importation new strains of the virus from developing countries due to globalization.*

**Article 5**

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

* *Inability to access live-saving vaccines based on where the individual lives is cruel and has led to mental torture for persons who live and work in developing countries. The mental health cases have spiked since the onset of the pandemic. The inability to be vaccinated against it, due to access barriers has not helped either.*

**Article 13**

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State.

2. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

* *Developing countries are not only struggling to get access to sufficient amount of vaccines. They are also facing travel difficulties to locations in countries who insist on vaccine certification. This is made worse by the non-recognition of some vaccine types already administered by countries. Practices such as these limit the right to freedom of movement, despite full and complete vaccination. It is a violation of the human right. This situation was caused in the first place by inadequate access from the same developed countries who are now instituting policies that cause travel restrictions.*

**Article 16**

1. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

2. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

3. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

* *The family has suffered and borne most of the impacts of the pandemic and the failure to ensure equity in access to vaccines. The families of persons living in developing, poor, hard to reach areas have not enjoyed the protection of the State from COVID-19 through vaccinations. Countries are forced to ration vaccines and distribute them on the basis of priority and not equality. The rights of many family units to protection has not been guaranteed thus far.*

**Article 23**

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

2. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.

3. Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.

4. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

* *The right to work and earn a decent wage has been compromised by the pandemic and pushed countries and families into recession and financial hardship. Looting and petty crimes were reported as effects of lockdown measures that are still partially in place. The delay in universal access to vaccines in a timely and equitable manner, prolongs the possibility of regaining the right to work.*

**Article 25**

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

* *Without access to preventive vaccination services for the vast majority of our populace, the right enshrined in article 25 is not attainable. The longer these access barriers remain, the more the rights to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security are lost.*

**Article 26**

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

* *This right to education suffered from the restrictions and lock down measures instituted to contain the spread of COVID-19. If all people who need vaccines, had access to it, then many more schools will remain open under conditions that are safe for learning without the possibility of schooling becoming ‘super-spreader’ events for COVID-19.*

11. In spite of these human right implications, vulnerabilities, and challenges, there are good and promising initiatives and examples of international cooperation that Nigeria adopted to mitigate problems of poor, timely, equitable, and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines. These examples include:

a). the deployment of single shot vaccines like J&J in hard-to-reach and security challenged areas, to ensure that persons in these areas are not lost to follow up due to access barrier.

b). access to joint collaborative procurement of vaccines for African countries coordinated by the African Development Bank.

c). investment in regional vaccine hub for Africa and the initiative for local manufacture of vaccines on the continent.