**Full-day intersessional seminar on good practices, key challenges and new developments relevant to access to medicines and vaccines**

**8 December 2021 | CLOSING SESSION 16:15-16:30 (CEST)**

**Closing remarks by Peggy Hicks, Director, Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division, OHCHR**

Excellencies, dear colleagues.

This has been a day of very productive and useful exchanges.

Today, with the spread of new variants and new waves of infection, we are now having a ‘pandemic of the unvaccinated’.

Despite the development of effective vaccines in record time, more people have died in 2021 than in 2020. The pandemic continues to wreak havoc on developed and developing countries alike.

As long as vaccines are not available for all, people across the globe will continue to suffer a wide range of human rights impacts, including socio-economic impacts, as highlighted by the panel discussion this morning.

Equitable, affordable, timely and universal access to vaccines is a fundamental element of the right to health. It has moreover become as principal fault line of the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In building back better, we need to address existing structural and systemic discrimination and pervasive inequalities, which are at the root of vaccine inequity.

And we need to close the gap between advanced economies and developing countries. As long as vaccines are not available for all, people across the globe will continue to suffer a wide range of human rights impacts, including socio-economic impacts.

This requires international solidarity and cooperation. As UN Secretary-General stated, the entire United Nations system stands behind the COVID-19 vaccination strategy set out by the WHO, with the aim of getting vaccines into the arms of 40 percent of people in all countries by the end of this year, and 70 percent by the middle of 2022.

OHCHR is contributing to the review of national vaccine plans to ensure no one is left behind, and provide human rights guidance on a range of issues, including vaccine mandates which the High Commissioner referred to in her opening statement.

In line with the Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights and Our Common Agenda, OHCHR has stepped up our efforts on economic, social and cultural rights, inequalities and Leaving No One Behind under the High Commissioner’s leadership.

Under the Surge Initiative and with a team of macroeconomic specialists, we are providing country- and context-specific analysis of policy options that countries may pursue to strengthen health systems through universal health coverage. Together with our UN system partners, we will also continue our work to support the building of universal social protection systems to overcome and prevent crises.

Excellencies, dear colleagues,

In today’s seminar, panellists and participants shared a number of challenges, good practices and lessons. As requested by the resolution 41/10, OHCHR will be submitting the summary report of today’s seminar to the 49th session of the Council next year. Also for the same session, the High Commissioner will be submitting a report on equitable access to vaccines mandated by Council resolution 46/14.

Once again, thank you for our panellists and participants for sharing your valuable insights, experience and advice. I also thank the Government of Brazil and other States for your leadership in moving this agenda forward.

Our Office stands ready to support our collective efforts to ensure equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all to vaccines, for sustainable recovery from the pandemic towards the full realization of the right to health and other human rights.

Thank you.