

Distinguished Ambassador Juan Sandoval Mendiola, Vice-President of ECOSOC;

Distinguished Mr. Volker Turk, Moderator of this Second Integration Dialogue;

Distinguished colleagues of the Bureau;

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to represent the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in this important discussion on building back better towards inclusive, sustainable, and just economies for recovery: Re-designing the contract between people and planet.

In the context of this very essential perspective, I would like to stress that the CESCR adopted Statements on Universal and Equitable Access to Vaccines for COVID-19 on 27/11/2020 and on Universal affordable vaccination against COVID-19, international cooperation and intellectual property on 12 March 2021. These Statements clarify the main obligations of States parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) regarding the human rights approach to the current pandemic. Every human being has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. This includes access to immunization programs against infectious diseases. People are also entitled to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress, including access to a safe and effective vaccine developed on the basis of the best scientific knowledge. During pandemics, such as the one caused by the coronavirus, it is science that must guide all the knowledge capable of combating them.

The rights protected by the Covenant also underpin the Sustainable Development Goals, including concerns related to increasing inequalities within and between countries. This is an issue that is at the heart of the Committee's work, as well as of the SDGs and our common efforts to building back better towards inclusive, sustainable and just economies for recovery.

In this view, access to vaccines for everyone must be guaranteed by countries to the maximum of their available resources and according to the measures necessary for universal vaccination and without any discrimination. The duty to immunize against major infectious diseases and to prevent and control epidemics is a priority obligation as a consequence of the right to health. Therefore, in the current pandemic scenario, countries must give top priority to the availability of vaccines that are effective in the fight against COVID-19. This access is a human right and should be facilitated by countries, especially when they are party to the ICESCR. These countries have an obligation to provide reliable and transparent information based on the best scientific

knowledge so that citizens can decide whether or not to get vaccinated. In this regard, all administrative and bureaucratic obstacles must be overcome in favour of rapid and effective public policies for universal and equitable access to vaccines.

The right to health requires countries to make health facilities, services and goods, including vaccines, accessible, acceptable and of good quality. Vaccines must not only be produced and available, but, in accordance with the principle of equality and non-discrimination, they must be accessible to all: reasons such as religion, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnic identity, age, disability, migration status, social origin, poverty or any other must not be an impediment. On the contrary, physical accessibility to vaccines, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged groups, must be ensured through governmental or private channels, especially by strengthening delivery and distribution capacity. On the other hand, vaccines must be guaranteed free of charge, especially for people living in poverty and with low levels of income. Furthermore, in this digital age and of fake news, access to relevant information must be strongly guaranteed, through credible scientific information on the safety and efficacy of different vaccines, reinforced by public campaigns to protect people from false, misleading or pseudoscientific information.

Many vaccines, about to be approved, have been developed by private companies and may be subject to the intellectual property regime. These companies expect to make a profit and it is fair that they should receive reasonable compensation for their investments. However, intellectual property is not a human right, but a social product with a social function. Consequently, countries have a duty to prevent intellectual property and patent law regimes from undermining the enjoyment of human rights. Therefore, it is also up to business entities to refrain from invoking intellectual property rights that are incompatible with the human right of access to a safe and effective vaccine against COVID-19. Countries have an obligation to ensure universal and equitable access to vaccines as soon as possible and by all necessary means, including through international assistance and cooperation.

The prioritization of access to vaccines must be supported by all and must be organized through transparent and participatory mechanisms that can guarantee a global distribution based on real medical needs and scientific considerations of public health. Any human being who wants to be vaccinated, can and should do so. No one should be left behind if they decide to get vaccinated. International cooperation is key. This is crucial to controlling the covid-19 pandemic.

Thank you very much!