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Statement

by

H.E. Hon Dr. Ralph E. Gonsalves

Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Open VTC - Ensuring Equitable Access for COVID-19 Vaccines in Contexts Affected by Conflict and Instability

Security Council

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Thank you Mr. President,

Let me begin by expressing, on behalf of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, our appreciation to the United Kingdom for convening today's very pertinent discussion. We also thank the briefers for sharing compelling insights on this important topic.

The number of deaths, the level of economic destruction, and the social dislocations associated with COVID-19 continue to expand globally as new variants of the virus, with increased transmissibility, threaten to disrupt even the most resilient of societies. Amidst this continuously evolving threat, the question of equitable access to vaccines is of paramount concern. The simple truth is that unless vaccines are made available, affordable, and accessible to all, many vulnerable countries and peoples, including those affected by conflict, would suffer, unbearably, as the pandemic continues to destroy lives and livelihoods.

Greater international cooperation amongst all countries, international financial institutions (IFIs) and major pharmaceutical companies is clearly required. The United Nations and its specialised agencies, such as the World Health Organization, should maintain a central role in ensuring that vaccines can be administered, safely, efficiently and globally to all persons in high-risk categories, and more widely, to achieve population immunity.

In this regard, we would welcome an enforceable international rules-based compact to deliver vaccines to all who need it. We also reiterate the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) call for a global summit in the context of the World Health Organization's Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A) Facilitation Council to discuss equitable access and global distribution of vaccines. We in the

Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are resolved to share with each other, on the basis of need, whatever quantities of vaccines we receive or procure.

Political will, principled engagements and solidarity among all nations remain crucial elements for overcoming COVID-19. There is the disturbing trend of "vaccine nationalism": Some wealthy countries hoard critical medical supplies, including vaccines. Such conduct only prolongs the pandemic. Many, too, will suffer, needlessly, if vaccine delivery is determined by a narrow market calculus rather than the social imperative of building immunity everywhere, in solidarity with each other. We urge vaccine manufacturers, as a gesture of good-faith towards humanity, to work with developing countries to expand production capabilities, hence alleviating the strain on global supply chains. We also call for

greater financial support to the COVAX facility to bolster the global inoculation campaign.

During this difficult period, the Security Council must continue working in unison with other organs of the United Nations to systematically address the various dimensions of this pandemic. Our delegation remains fully supportive of all efforts to promote a global ceasefire to armed conflicts everywhere. This ceasefire would afford conflict-affected countries the time and space to advance peace processes; and would facilitate the sustained delivery of life-saving humanitarian, developmental and capacity-building assistance. A ceasefire will also ensure that vaccines can be distributed safely to those made most vulnerable by conflict, including internally displaced persons and refugees. Where mandates and capabilities allow, Peacekeeping Operations could be

utilised to assist with the transportation and distribution of vaccines, including providing protection to those designated personnel who administer vaccines.

Mr. President,

As we approach the one-year anniversary since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, we must work together, urgently and intently, to build back better. Equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines must form part of any serious effort to recover, sustainably, from this pandemic. Let us be reminded of our common promise to humanity, under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, of leaving no one behind. No one will be safe until everyone is safe. And immunity can only be achieved when it is collectively composed.

Thank You.