



Global TB Caucus Statement on COVID-19 and Tuberculosis (TB)

The Executive Committee of the Global TB Caucus, representing parliamentarians from every region of the world, met on 29th May to discuss the current COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on other infectious diseases such as tuberculosis (TB).

The meeting discussed the importance of reaching across political and geographical divides to build commitment in members' own countries and beyond to secure a coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the TB epidemic, based on the right of every human being to health.

Participants acknowledged the threat that the COVID-19 pandemic poses to global health and to the wellbeing of our citizens, including the severe disruption of our societies and economies as they were, and the sudden shift in priorities of other health services. For TB this means that global incidence and deaths would increase at alarming levels, which could lead to an additional 6 million people falling ill and 1.4 million additional deaths.

Particular emphasis was placed on the fact that the poor and most vulnerable people are the most affected and that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will have unprecedented repercussions on the TB epidemic, hampering progress in the achievement of the vital targets agreed in the Political Declaration from the UN High Level Meeting on TB by at least 5 to 8 years.

The Committee reaffirmed the crucial role of the World Health Organisation and its leadership in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst not neglecting other global epidemics such as TB. It noted that strengthening and preparing health systems for future pandemics requires funding commitments for infectious diseases and universal access to quality prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care.

The role of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria as a means to strengthen efforts towards achieving the Political Declaration from the UN High Level Meeting on TB and the Sustainable Development Goals targets, together with investment in health systems strengthening to respond to the three diseases and pandemics such as COVID-19 was highlighted.

Finally, the Committee recognised that the current pandemic highlights the need for patient focused and publicly funded product development in vaccines, treatments and diagnostics and that these investments need to assure access and affordability for all. This is true for COVID-19 as well as diseases like TB and other current and future pandemics.



The leaders of the Global TB Caucus committed to apply the experience acquired from the past five years in the forefront of political advocacy efforts on tackling TB, and to use all of the means at our disposal to urge sustained action from our governments to control the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee therefore recommended that all members of the Global TB Caucus should:

- Reaffirm their commitment to the targets agreed in the Political Declaration of the UN High Level Meeting on TB, since now, more than ever, we need to strengthen international ties and work together in order to ensure a holistic, financed and sustainable response to TB.
- Work with our governments to ensure that adequate financing is made available to safeguard the progress made in the response to TB at the national, regional and global levels, and that existing funding for TB is not repurposed, as well as honouring their pledges to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria which is responsible for a sustainable financing of the three diseases in many high burden countries, whilst also investing in pandemic preparedness and the strengthening of health systems.
- Support the World Health Organisation and to work in close collaboration to strengthen our health systems capacities, in order to respond to this and future pandemics and health security threats, as well as other infectious diseases including tuberculosis, through the principles of Universal Health Coverage.
- Call on our governments to sustain essential health services, including routine TB services, even as lockdowns or restrictions are in place. This includes continued use of existing tools and technologies for diagnosing and treating TB, in order to ensure continuity of care for people with TB, as well as calling on our governments to prioritise the implementation of novel shorter and more effective all-oral regimens and phase out the use of injectables in DR-TB treatment regimens.
- Call on governments for a sustained production of essential TB medicines, to avoid major drug stock-outs in the coming months.
- Press our governments and relevant multilateral agencies to promote and ensure global access to medicines, vaccines, medical equipment, and to fund the Research & Development needed to fight emerging infectious diseases like COVID-19, other public health threats and TB.
- Push for people-centred legislations that protect human rights in response to COVID-19 and to avoid language and policies that can have long-term negative implications for the response to other infectious diseases; to protect, safeguard, respect and promote the human rights of all affected directly or indirectly by the pandemic, especially those who are most vulnerable, without discrimination.



As a unique international network, the Global TB Caucus will play our part to support the response to this devastating pandemic. We commit to working in partnership with all stakeholders, including TB survivors, the World Health Organisation, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, the Stop TB Partnership, the International Union Against TB and Lung Disease, KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation, Product Development Partnerships, civil society, among others, to ensure that the world recovers from this crisis. We pay tribute to all health care professionals and frontline workers for the essential services they are providing to our societies and citizens.

The Global TB Caucus Executive Committee