



The Commonwealth

**2 September 2021
Annual H2O Health Summit
Keynote address from Commonwealth Secretary-General The Rt Hon
Patricia Scotland QC**

It is an honour to be able to speak to you today, leaders from across the world, men and women who in the past year have been part of the fight against our common enemy the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many of you will have spent sleepless nights and long hours struggling to ensure the safety and future of your people. You will have spent restless days working to hold back the tide of infection and striving to find a way to keep your people, your country, indeed your very society safe.

You have shown leadership and I thank you for that. No one asks to be the person in charge at these momentous periods in history but you have all been a part of shouldered that burden regardless and worked towards our shared goal, defeating the Covid-19 pandemic.

Yet as it has been said, while we are all in the same storm, we are not in the same boat.

The wealthiest countries in the world have faced a multitude of challenges yes, but also significantly more resources than the rest of the world.

They have all faced real and pressing dangers, but with much more capacity to meet these challenges.

It has also been said that with Covid-19 until everyone is safe, no one is safe.



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This is ever truer as we see the devastating impact of new Covid-19 variants as the virus mutates to find new ways to spread despite the remarkable achievements we have made in vaccination.

The hard truth now is that we face not a race against “the” Covid-19 virus but a race against its variants.

As we speak in some parts of the world, many of them in the Commonwealth, the storm of Covid-19 is increasing in ferocity, while others, again some of whom are in the Commonwealth, have found shelter through successful vaccination programmes. But this shelter can only ever be temporary if we do not protect everyone.

To allow COVID-19 to run unfettered in those parts of the world which so far have been unable to protect themselves through vaccination, is to allow the virus to adapt, mutate and create stronger faster deadlier variants that can only doom us all to more and longer suffering.

That is why it is in the interests of the G20 countries and their people to make sure that all of countries are protected.

Truly, until everyone is safe in this storm no one is safe.

There is no quarantine policy, public health programme or vaccination rate that can protect your populations nearly as well as eradicating the virus from all our countries through a concerted and coordinated drive for vaccination.

We all understand this and yet it seems to all of us a challenge too large to fix on our own. And it is too large. The truth is it requires all of us to work together, for the Common Good.



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Despite recent commitments by the G7, G20 and others we continue to see the stockpiling of vaccines by high income countries and recently of countries embarking on booster doses, while many low-middle and income countries still do not have access to the much-needed vaccines supplies for the health care workers or vulnerable populations in their countries.

There has been some progress, as when in April 2020 the World Health Organization and other partners launched the ACT accelerator and COVAX facility.

By 13 August 2021, COVAX had shipped over 196 million COVID-19 vaccines to 138 participants, with 45 Commonwealth countries benefiting from this initiative.

However, as COVID-19 continues to spread and new variants emerge, progress on equitably distributing vaccines and other vital resources for tackling the pandemic falls woefully short of what is needed.

As of 26th August 2021, around 5.08 billion doses have been administered, with only 1.4% of the vaccines administered globally having gone to people in low-income countries.

Let me be frank: if there is one lesson to learn from the crisis so far it is that this divided and halfhearted approach to the pandemic dooms us all to a prolonged crisis, maybe even a forever crisis.

And it is not just a health crisis. The economic, social and health consequences of this pandemic will have a long and devastating impact. We are already seeing instability and unrest across the world as a result of this crisis.



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Perhaps the soundest financial investment anyone could make at this time is to invest in vaccination to ensure increased economic growth and stability to allow us all to build back from the devastation many of us face.

In countries around the world as the pandemic unfolded, we were urged to act selflessly to protect the most vulnerable. I would now argue that as some of the more affluent countries of the world start to emerge from the crisis as they vaccinate increasing proportions of their populations, we now must work to protect the smallest and most vulnerable.

And I would urge that we start with the 42 small states of the world, 32 of which are members of the Commonwealth which I have the honour of representing.

The combined population of the 42 smallest states in the world is around 41 million people.

And here is an interesting coincidence: around 41 million Covid-19 vaccine doses are currently administered each day globally.

For just two days' worth of global vaccines we could fully vaccinate and protect the smallest and most vulnerable nations among us.

For just two days' worth of global vaccines we could protect the populations of around 20% of the world's nation states.

It is achievable, it is realisable and it would be a forthright statement of intent from the richest and most powerful in the world, to the smallest and most vulnerable, that they are not to be left behind.



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It would demonstrate to the world, despite its challenges, is committed to ensuring that all of us make our way through this storm.

And from this first coordinated step, this starting point, I believe we could move to protect many more, vaccinating the vulnerable and front line staff across the world. Working with more vulnerable states in Africa, Asia and around the rest of the world to ensure they too are protected from the pandemic, and in doing so protect ourselves and our countries from new variants and surges in infection.

But to achieve this we must work together. To fail to properly finance and resource vaccinations and the fight against Covid-19 in every part of the world risks all our safety.

As the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, I represent 54 member states across every region of this world.

The Commonwealth Secretariat I run doesn't have the resources of a state, the manpower or finances to deliver vaccines to our member states.

But the nations of the G20 do.

And we must work together over the coming weeks and months to try to put in place a plan to deliver vaccines to those small and vulnerable states.

To act to protect the populations of these most vulnerable countries and in doing so help to protect the populations of all countries.

The world has made some progress but let us renew our energy and commit to protecting the vulnerable by putting in place a plan to get small states vaccinated now, not next year or the year after.



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Not only because it is the right thing to do but because it is the wise thing to do and in the long term it will not only protect your populations but will also underpin the economic and social recovery of our world and offer hope and a way forward for so many desperate and in need people across the globe.

I thank you for this chance to talk to you and am your disposal to discuss how we can work together.

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