



## **Prof. Frank Ulrich Montgomery, Chair of Council - WMA**

My name is Frank Ulrich Montgomery. I represent WMA as Chair of Council. The World Medical Association (WMA) is the global federation of National Medical Associations representing millions of physicians worldwide. Acting on behalf of patients and physicians, WMA endeavours to achieve the highest possible standards of medical care, ethics, education and health-related human rights for all people. As such, the WMA plays a key role in promoting good practice, medical ethics and medical accountability internationally.

Vaccination is life! Since Edward Jenner introduced vaccination to Europe in 1796 - exactly 225 years ago - billions of lives have been saved worldwide through vaccinations. There is probably no other invention in medicine that has saved more lives and prevented more suffering than vaccination. We have eradicated smallpox, we are close to wiping polio off the surface of the earth and deadly diseases like measles have lost their frightening appearance. And science moves on – fast. New biological agents, viruses and bacteria are emerging, and new bacteria are spread out over the globe in a world of high mobility and increasing populations. Virus and bacteria strike back. They develop variants, mutations or simply develop resistance.

This is a challenge for medicine. We have just proven that we are willing and able to take up this fight. Vaccines against Corona have been developed in record-time. Billions of people have already been vaccinated – less than 18 months since we learned about the existence of Sars-Cov2.

We have also learned about gross inequities. Whilst rich, affluent countries urgently started vaccination campaigns, the majority of the world's population was left behind. Developing nations do not have the technology to develop vaccine production and they don't have the resources to buy vaccines from the rich producing countries. It is our moral obligation to overcome this outcry as fast as possible.

And whilst children and their parents, elderly people and chronically ill in developing countries cry out for help and ask for vaccines, we see reluctance to get vaccinated and opposition to vaccination in general - without any scientific evidence. The prevention paradox hits us with its full impact. Because we are so successful in preventing disease, people forget the terrorizing sights of large numbers of people dying in endemic or pandemic situations. This brings us into a most cynical position: whereas a child in a developing country is denied a safer life or even survival because its nation or its family cannot afford vaccinations there is also a child in an affluent country that is denied the life-saving prevention because of the ignorance or reluctance of their parents.

There is one more important point about vaccination. It is not only a prevention for the vaccinated person self – it also serves the population around that individual. People that cannot be vaccinated or that are not responsive to vaccines are preserved through the simple act of vaccinating others.

As physicians, as leaders in this world we have an obligation to protect our people. We therefore have to offer as much prevention through vaccination as possible in an equitable way and we must undertake all possible attempts to convince “anti-vaxxers” of the advantages and the chances of vaccination.

Our speakers highlighted these issues from different angles. The necessity of vaccination was not challenged but speakers and audience discussed ways to communicate and fight “fake-news”. Misinformation is one of the core reasons to vaccine-hesitancy. But we also see three vital factors for improving vaccinations: we have to improve Confidence, fight Complacency and deliver Convenience.

Equity is a core issue for international cooperation. 10 Countries in the world have delivered 80% of the 3 billion given doses up to now. And the future is seen in building up production plants for vaccine in low- and middle-income countries as hubs for cooperation and equity. And finally, the philosophical aspects of individual freedom versus common good were highlighted and led to an interesting discussion on the scope of mandatory vaccination.

What do we have to do next:

- 1) Reach underserved and underinformed communities in a combined effort of science, medicine and social multipliers such as religious communities.
- 2) Fight misinformation and fake-news.
- 3) Ensure solidarity.
- 4) Ensure equity.