



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Mr Albert Bourla
Chief Executive Officer
Pfizer
Via email

Dear Mr Bourla,

An Appeal to Help Save South African Lives

When Covid-19 first arrived on South African shores in March 2020, I, like many of my fellow citizens, feared for the worst. Our country was already trapped in a decade-long spiral of socio-economic decline. Five years before anyone had even heard of Covid-19, the state-run health department had [caused](#) the deaths of 143 psychiatric patients through starvation, corruption and neglect. Public healthcare services in provinces like the Eastern Cape were already on the verge of collapse. Nearly 30% of working-age South Africans were officially [unemployed](#), while millions more had long ago given up on finding gainful employment.

We feared that a government that [stole](#) \$100 billion from the people could not be trusted to save lives and livelihoods in the time of profound crisis that lay ahead. Today, I am writing to you because the worst is now coming to pass. South Africa is at breaking point.

But I want to be clear about this: our country has reached this point not out of weakness or for want of sacrifice on the part of its people. South Africans are a brave and strong people with a proud history of overcoming tremendous hardship. They demonstrated their resilience once again during this pandemic.

South Africans endured one of the most brutal lockdowns in the world, which saw police and soldiers [murdering](#) civilians in the street. They endured irrational and destructive prohibitions on the selling of everything from cooked food to clothes, tobacco and alcohol that has rendered 70% of young people [unemployed](#). They endured the grotesque spectacle of government officials – including the health minister and the president's own spokesperson – being implicated in the [theft](#) of over \$350 million meant to support the people during a global pandemic. They endured hospitals of [horror](#) where patients have to fight each other to get a supply of oxygen while they watch rats feeding on medical waste. And they continue to endure one of the [highest](#) Covid-19 death tolls in the world.

The South African people endured all of this violence, suffering, theft and death because they have come to expect nothing more from their elected leaders. Whereas governments in other countries were expected to carry the burden of the pandemic by ramping-up healthcare capacity and providing comprehensive financial support to keep people healthy and safe, South Africans knew from day one that they would have to carry these burdens alone.

But what South Africans cannot and will not endure – and what I fear could break our country's back – is the catastrophic failure by the national government to procure sufficient supplies of the life-saving vaccines your company produces.

While much of the rest of the world is slowly getting back to normal owing to the successful rollout of mass vaccination programmes, the South African government has utterly failed in its most basic duty to procure sufficient supplies of these life-saving drugs. While dozens of countries are approaching vaccination rates of 70%, less than 1% of South Africans have been fully vaccinated. In a catastrophic failure of leadership, the South African government did not even begin negotiations with vaccine suppliers until the end of 2020. In some cases, vaccine manufacturers [tried](#) for “months and months” to speak with the “non-responsive” national health department.

As public outrage escalated while we watched other countries launch mass vaccination programmes, the South African president responded by accusing vaccine manufacturers and other countries of supposed “vaccine apartheid” to try and deflect blame away from his own failure to protect the lives of citizens.

But try as he might, there is no denying the basic reality that, as a direct result of the central government's gross dereliction of duty, South Africa was this past Sunday placed back under hard lockdown as a third Covid-19 wave, driven by the Delta variant, burns a trail of deadly devastation through the country. Even as case-rates and death-rates plummet in countries with functional vaccination programmes, South Africa's case rates have soared.

It is my constitutional duty to today sound the alarm to you about what is happening in South Africa. Thousands of people are going to needlessly suffer and die because of our national government's complete inability, and apparent disinterest, in providing life-saving vaccines. South Africans have been left at the mercy of a government with blood on its hands because of the state's ideological determination that only the national government should be allowed to procure vaccines.

While I understand the practical preference that is also held by some vaccine manufacturers for limiting sales to national governments because of the sheer scale of the global rollout, I implore you to make an exception in the case of South Africa. Due to the globally unprecedented failure of the South African

national government, I appeal that you consider selling vaccines directly to the South African private sector and to all provincial governments that are able to manage a vaccination programme. The DA-run Western Cape Government stands ready and willing to procure its own vaccine supply to compensate for the failure of the national government.

After everything that the brave South African people have been forced to endure both before and during this pandemic, I am appealing to you to help save their lives by disregarding the irrational nationalisation command of the central government. The Covid-19 vaccines you have produced in record time will go down in history as one of the crowning achievements of modern medicine. It is now time to get those vaccines into as many arms as possible by any means necessary. I implore you to put the lives of innocent South Africans ahead of the mindless bureaucracy of a government that has proven itself entirely disinterested in procuring sufficient supplies of vaccines by opening-up vaccine sales to the private sector and to all provinces that are able to manage a vaccination programme.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Steenhuisen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'S'.

John Steenhuisen MP
Leader of the Official Opposition
Parliament of RSA

cc **Mamorena Mohatla**
Key Account Lead