



## **ICAO/WCO Joint Statement on the global transportation and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and associated medical supplies 2 February 2021**

In recent weeks, substantial progress has been made in the approval of vaccines intended to provide acquired immunity against the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus that has sparked the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, vaccine administration efforts in many regions will roll out to larger portions of global populations, with the process estimated to last for many months ahead. This important measure in the containment of the virus relies on the quick and reliable distribution of the vaccines across borders in a manner that ensures the safety of the products and protects people from counterfeit medical products.

The developed vaccines have differing storage and dosage requirements and other characteristics that will determine transport and packaging requirements from production centers to end users through the global supply chain.

Air cargo provides the speed and reliability that makes it the optimal means of transporting the vaccines and certain related goods over long distances. Besides, some of the large, infrastructural cargo commodities (e.g. large medical freezers) necessary to expand the “cold chain” could call for multimodal transport resources.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the World Customs Organization (WCO) call for open collaboration between the aviation and customs communities as well as those responsible for other transport modes and other relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure safe, secure and efficient transport of vaccines and associated equipment across borders.

In the COVID-19 pandemic context, ICAO and the WCO have produced and disseminated guidance and information that is publicly available on their websites<sup>1</sup>.

With regard to the COVID-19 vaccines distribution efforts, our two Organizations seek, through digitalization and flexibility of the export, transit and import processes in air cargo operations, including robust risk management mechanisms, to significantly increase the speed at which vaccines can be delivered to the end user, whilst minimizing the risk of distribution of unsafe and counterfeited medical products.

WCO and ICAO are collaborating with each other, as well as with the involved stakeholders to develop and execute needed plans intended to facilitate safe, secure, and efficient vaccine delivery.

Our two Organizations are seeking the support of Governments to show maximum flexibility with respect to border clearance and transport operations, essential to the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, related medical supplies, and establishment of the infrastructure needed from provenance to the end users.

In order to expedite air cargo transport and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines in full adherence to the *Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention)* and the *International Convention on the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures (Revised Kyoto Convention)* and relevant provisions

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/coronavirus.aspx> and <https://www.icao.int/covid/Pages/default.aspx>

flowing from them pertaining to COVID-19, we urge Governments and relevant national and local authorities to:

- designate aviation staff as ‘key workers’ providing an essential service in alignment with the World Health Organization (WHO)’s Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunization proposed Roadmap for Prioritizing Uses of COVID-19 Vaccines which outlines priority populations for vaccination based on epidemiologic settings and vaccine supply scenarios. Within this framework, SAGE has included transportation workers;
- adhere to the relevant ICAO Annex 9 Standards intended to ensure sustainable air cargo operations and global air cargo supply chain;
- ensure the acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccination certificate developed to be interoperable along the lines of appropriate ICAO Annex 9 – *Facilitation* Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and related technical specifications, in cases where proof of vaccination is required to facilitate the entry, departure and transit of persons into, out of or through States.
- ensure coordination amongst civil aviation authorities, public health authorities and other relevant stakeholders, ideally through the National Air Transport Facilitation Committee;
- implement a Public Health Corridor as outlined in the ICAO Electronic Bulletin 2020/30 published on 11 May 2020 to protect flight crews of cargo operation;
- carry out the customs clearance of situationally critical medicines and vaccines for export, transit and import as a matter of priority in appropriate facilities in order to prevent possible detrimental product temperature variations due to delays;
- provide special procedures for authorized/recognized supply chain actors, including producers of COVID-19 vaccines;
- apply risk-based control and perform examinations on shipments declared as such medicines and vaccines only at the appropriate moment and place;
- ensure that inspections by customs and other government agencies are coordinated and, if possible, carried out at the same time;
- commit to working together to facilitate international trade and coordinate responses in ways that avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade as it relates to COVID-19 medicines and ensure that emergency measures aimed at protecting health are targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary;
- ensure that customs, security and other involved staff are trained to handle specialized temperature-sensitive items, including those involving the use of dangerous goods (e.g. dry ice) for their transportation; and
- take appropriate measures to prevent organized criminal organizations from exploiting the situation, and to address the threat posed by illegal products in the cases of dangerous, substandard or counterfeit medicines and vaccines.

We urge Governments and all involved stakeholders to bring the contents of this joint statement to the attention of the competent authorities and all concerned entities to ensure without delay an effective, safe and secure transportation and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Dr. Fang Liu  
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International Civil Aviation Organization  
(ICAO)

Dr. Kunio Mikuriya  
Secretary General  
World Customs Organization  
(WCO)

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kunio Mikuriya". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.