

Health

VACCINES: THE VALUE
OF PATENTS AND THE
VALUE OF LIVES

Education

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS
OF FULBRIGHT
SCHOLARSHIPS

G20

A SPACE FOR
HOLDING A
DISCUSSION ON
CRUCIAL ISSUES IN
THE CULTURAL
GLOBAL AGENDA

EMBASSY OF ARGENTINA, WASHINGTON, D.C.

ARGENTINA IN FOCUS

MAY 2021 // NEWSLETTER



VACCINES: THE VALUE OF PATENTS AND THE VALUE OF LIVES

By Jorge Argüello, Ambassador of Argentina

In less than a year and a half, the world went from living in fear due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, to responding by simultaneously producing several vaccines that have already immunized hundreds of millions of people and are now giving hope to thousands of millions more who still need them.

This reaction was the outcome of the combined effort of scientists and private laboratories capable of reacting to the emergency and -as the last instance- of States committed to protecting

their populations while mitigating as best they could the economic and social impacts of the crisis.

The different vaccines came about as a result of universal knowledge, but their production was anchored in national commercial structures that soon revealed the inequality that marks our era. It is true that efficient vaccines were achieved for the whole of humanity, but they are available in time barely for a small part.



Once again, I share with you the latest edition of our Embassy Newsletter. This edition includes an article about the current debate focused on the equitable global distribution of vaccines against COVID-19.

In this edition we include article on Argentina's relationship with the Fulbright scholarship program on the 75th anniversary of its creation.

Finally, an article on the Argentine participation in the second meeting of the G20 Culture Working Group and the points in common with the others G20 countries.

Jorge Argüello
Ambassador to the United States

ACCORDING TO THE WHO, AS OF APRIL, MORE THAN 87% OF THE VACCINE DOSES ADMINISTERED WORLDWIDE WERE GIVEN IN THE RICHEST COUNTRIES, COMPARED TO 0.2% IN LOW-INCOME COUNTRIES.

The COVAX initiative has only partially accomplished its noble mission of ensuring an equitable global distribution of vaccines.

Global public good. The G20, of which Argentina is part, took early note of the problem at the 2020 Summit, in which President Alberto Fernández framed vaccines as a “global public good”. Two members of the group, India and South Africa, later pushed for the temporary exemption of intellectual property before the World Trade Organization (WTO), and this was supported by many other countries, and more recently by the United States as well.

With immunization making good progress on US soil, the Biden Administration agreed to a temporary suspension of intellectual property protection on vaccines: “Extraordinary situations demand extraordinary measures,” he concluded. The European Union (EU) also declared I was “ready to discuss” this proposal in the name of efficacy and pragmatism when tackling the virus.

However, other countries and mainly the companies that own the licenses objected to the reasonableness of an exemption. They argue that in any case, a massive transfer of technology would then be necessary, in a timeframe greater than that required by the emergency. It would be better for them, then, to increase production under the same patent system.

That speculation, however, would leave us morally and virtually shackled, immersed in an exercise of passivity that we cannot allow in view of the thousands of daily deaths. As when facing any catastrophe, we are obliged to do everything possible, even when it seems impossible.

Undeniably, many laboratories made an investment effort that must be acknowledged, and it is recognized, but the States also promoted and financed the previous scientific development required to achieve a good outcome.

When addressing global health, the value of a patent becomes relative, and this ultimately depends on an adequate cost-benefit ratio, but one related to health. Under this criteria, in 2005 the world proceeded to a flexibilization of patents on retroviral treatments for HIV/AIDS (it is estimated that more than 25 million people saved their lives since then).

The only absolute value, then, is that of life itself. It is estimated that the world needs approximately 11 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to immunize 70% of the world's population (two doses per person), but the global annual manufacturing capacity under patents is under 8.5 billion. At this rate, there may not be vaccines for everyone until 2023, or even 2024.

The dilemma thus becomes, in addition to moral, practical. With so many unvaccinated populations, the entire planet is at risk.

The COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) platform was created in 2020, within the scope of the World Health Organization (WHO), to promote the voluntary transfer of patents, technology and treatments related to the virus.

EXPERTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD ARE BEGINNING TO CONSIDER MULTILATERAL AGREEMENTS THAT OPTIMIZE PRODUCTION CAPACITY AND RAMP UP DISTRIBUTION.

However, until early 2021 it had not received any input from the large laboratories.

According to the WHO, as of April, more than 87% of the vaccine doses administered worldwide were given in the richest countries, compared to 0.2% in low-income countries. The United States, for example, will reach its required production in June, and at this rate will have a surplus of 1.2 billion doses by the end of 2021.

Solutions. While the patent issue is being resolved, experts from around the world are beginning to study multilateral agreements that could at least optimize production capacity and ramp up distribution, in spite of all the practical logistical problems this entails.

Among these, one being considered would better align vaccine supply and demand (matching) in such a way that, regardless of the rate of purchase agreements between different States, there is an optimal use of installed capacity. In other words, that there not be laboratories that are not producing, while populations are waiting for a vaccine.

The States already have national, regional and multilateral tools available to them to remove all restrictions imposed on the commercial market of vaccines, supplies and other medical resources to address the pandemic, smooth their import process, and opening up their export.

As regards distribution, certain States, such as Argentina, have taken valuable initiatives, such as the use of their flagship airlines. Furthermore, the establishment of alliances that associate public and private media is also currently being debated, with the assistance of multilateral organizations (WHO, UNICEF), in order to accelerate the global transfer of vaccines, swiftly and under adequate conditions.

It is clear that a temporary suspension of vaccine patents and other intellectual property rights in the fight against COVID-19 would be a fundamental and unequalled step towards a rapid and complete global immunization in the short, medium and even long term. An effective licensing system must guarantee a global supply of vaccines.

The lives of billions of people, and the memory of those that already left us, exceed in absolute values the economic calculation of any license, and invite us to solve the challenges of putting in place extraordinary measures such as those needed due to the global COVID -19 crisis. ■

SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS OF FULBRIGHT SCHOLARSHIPS

The Fulbright Scholarship Program was created after the Second World War, at the initiative of Senator J. William Fulbright, with the idea that greater cultural and educational exchanges between peoples would contribute to promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, and would ultimately diminish the number of future conflicts.

This program is funded by the United States Congress and has enjoyed a strong bipartisan support since its creation. Throughout its 75 years, Fulbright scholarships have acquired great international prestige and are highly competitive. It operates in 160 countries and more than 400,000 scholarships have been awarded, at a rate of around 8,000 fellowships a year. Applicants must undergo a rigorous selection process and are chosen on the basis of merit, academic excellence, and leadership ability, in areas that reflect the mutual interests of partner nations.

Funding for the program comes primarily from the United States Government. In Argentina, the program began in 1956 and, since then, more than 10,000 scholarships have been awarded to citizens of both countries. Since 1993, the Argentine Government has made a permanent contribution of funds to the program; other Argentine public and private institutions also provide funds for specific scholarship programs.

Under this program, some 300 scholarships are currently awarded per year in various fields of study to outstanding young Argentines who wish to obtain a Master's or Doctoral degree in a United States university: scholarships for Argentine researchers to carry out projects in the United States with colleagues from the US and other countries; scholarships for young English teachers who spend an academic year as Teachers Assistants in Spanish classes at educational

Fulbright scholarship recipients



UNDER THIS PROGRAM, SOME
300 SCHOLARSHIPS ARE
CURRENTLY AWARDED PER
YEAR IN VARIOUS FIELDS OF
STUDY TO OUTSTANDING
YOUNG ARGENTINES WHO
WISH TO OBTAIN A MASTER'S
OR DOCTORAL DEGREE IN A
UNITED STATES UNIVERSITY.

institutions in the United States; scholarships for undergraduate students who participate in 6-week academic and cultural group programs, as well as scholarships for teachers and directors of primary and secondary schools in Argentina, who spend three weeks visiting schools and taking courses at universities in the United States.

In addition, scholarships are awarded to young US citizens who stay in Argentina for an academic year taking courses and working on research projects in Argentine universities, or to be Teaching Assistants in English, such as Adam Miller, who described his experience as “exciting; one I will never forget as long as I live.”

Scholarships are also given to American professors to teach classes and carry out research projects with Argentine colleagues at universities in our country. For Professor Thomas Zeiler of the University of Colorado Boulder, his time in Argentina within the framework of the program left him with “good memories, and admiration for students and colleagues in Buenos Aires,” while this also allowed him to not only “learn about Argentina, but also about how the United States is perceived, as well as my own values and perspectives.”

Throughout the years, all these scholarship recipients have contributed and continue to

contribute to build bridges between our two countries and forging strong ties between outstanding teams of academics, researchers, professionals, artists, journalists, diplomats and political representatives, such as María Emilia Bravo, who noted “I hope this is the beginning of a solid and lasting institutional bond. My host also expressed interest in participating in the teaching program, and this interest is very valuable considering this scientific expert’s potential influence in our country”.

Fulbright scholars also join international networks in which they interact with colleagues from around the world that share the same ideals of peace, tolerance and progress for all countries, as stated by María Elisa Dugo, for whom “it is an honor to be one of the Fulbright scholars from Argentina and the world. Everyone I had the pleasure of meeting was automatically joined by a feeling familiarity, as we underwent a similar process, sharing similar values and expectations. Besides, I can say that many are now great friends of mine.”

We would like to send greetings to the Fulbright Scholarship Program as it celebrates its 75-year anniversary on August 1st. ■



The second meeting of the G20 Culture Working Group.

A SPACE FOR HOLDING A DISCUSSION ON CRUCIAL ISSUES IN THE CULTURAL GLOBAL AGENDA

The second meeting of the G20 Culture Working Group under the Italian Presidency began with the welcome remarks by the representative of the Italian Ministry of Culture, Paolo Toschi. Colleagues from France, China, Germany, Indonesia, Australia, the European Union and the United States addressed the webinar. On the following day, spokespersons of the United Kingdom and Saudi Arabia made their contributions, and the floor was opened for a general discussion among the members of the working group, after which they reached the final conclusions.

The objective of the meeting was to share national priorities on issues such as heritage protection and illicit trafficking; addressing the climate crisis through culture; capacity building through training and education; the digital transition and new

technologies; the role of culture and creative industries in supporting growth.

Our country was represented by Francisco Taiana, Director of International Cooperation at the Ministry of Culture, who praised the meeting as a space for debating crucial issues on the global cultural agenda, in order to collectively think about possible responses and actions to the most pressing problems. He spoke in favor of strengthening international cooperation, working together, sharing good practices and relevant information, and the participation of international organizations to face the enormous current and future challenges.

The Director also highlighted the work carried out with multilateral organizations in the country, 30 years after the creation of the Southern Common

CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS INCREASED THEIR PROGRAMMING IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE CRISIS AND DISCOVERED THAT DIGITIZATION OPENS UP NEW POSSIBILITIES, INCLUDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INNOVATIVE AND SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODELS.

Market (MERCOSUR), in which Argentina holds the pro tempore presidency this semester.

In line with the principles of democracy and economic development promoted by our country, MERCOSUR has reached agreements on migration, labor, and social and cultural matters. In this regard, there is a “Cultural Mercosur”, in which different projects are developed and promoted around diversity, gender, indigenous peoples, environment, youth, memory.

Several actions should be highlighted, such as the exchange of policies for the protection and promotion of cultural diversity; the fight against the illicit traffic of cultural goods; the promotion of cultural industries, with concrete actions such as the Market of Cultural Industries of the South, the Virtual Library of MERCOSUR (made up of literary works of high cultural value for the countries of the region); and film shown on public platforms that feature the region's audiovisual productions, among others.

In this area of cooperation, the recognition of the ESMA (School of Mechanics of the Navy, former center of detention, torture and extermination) as a cultural heritage of MERCOSUR, as a previous step to its recognition as a world heritage site, is being promoted as a place that profoundly challenges Argentines and the

inhabitants of the Southern Cone regarding its painful recent history. The ESMA building is currently a Memorial Site Museum for the promotion and defense of human rights.

It should be noted that under the MERCOSUR pro tempore presidency of Argentina, the results of a regional study measuring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the creative and cultural industries will be presented.

This study, in which all the member countries participated, as well as Mexico and Costa Rica, and with the joint effort with UNESCO, IDB, SEGIB and OEI, shows the strong impact that the pandemic has had on the creation of value of cultural industries (which fell up to 14% in 2020) and indicates the trends we have observed, linked to the regulation of cultural industries, which in many cases were designed for the analog world.

However, there are also some encouraging numbers from cultural institutions that increased their programming in the immediate aftermath of the crisis and discovered that digitization opens up new possibilities, including new audiences or the development of new sustainable business models. There are undoubtedly many challenges ahead.

We believe the most important are the following: updating the regulatory frameworks to include the virtual world; organization of the labor and production market within the cultural and creative industries to guarantee equal opportunity; development of multisectoral training programs that promote the use of new digital tools, and the design and implementation of policies that strengthen access to international markets for our cultural industries, among others. In our opinion, generating data and information is essential in the post-crisis reconstruction process.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF CREATIVE CULTURE IN THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS DEMONSTRATES THAT THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC POLICIES AIMED AT IMPROVING CONDITIONS FOR JOB CREATION

As we have maintained, there is no doubt that the cultural sector is a substantial development agent and that it helps reduce social inequalities.

The positive impact of creative culture in the economic, social and environmental dimensions demonstrates that the design of public policies aimed at improving conditions for job creation, adding value and improving our country's trade balance helps achieve overall economic growth. The cultural industries sector is a thriving productive one: it represents 2.6% of GDP.

To energize and strengthen this sector, the Secretary of Cultural Development of the Ministry of Culture, led by Lucrecia Cardoso, has given priority to the Argentine Cultural Industries Market (MICA), that sets an agenda that will allow us to enhance production, contribute to visibility and foster commercialization in all areas of the cultural industries.

In order to forge ahead in this context, and understanding the opportunities presented by the exponential leap in the use of digital tools,

we developed a virtual platform to implement this policy, in accordance with the health care policies that our country is carrying out to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regional integration, internationalization and the growth of the economic scale in the ecosystem in which cultural assets are generated, are fundamental drivers that MICA proposes to consolidate itself as one of the most important entities for the region's creative economy. ■

Facebook: ARGinUSA

Twitter: ARGinUSA

Instagram: ARGinUSA

arginfocus@embassyofargentina.us

eeuu.cancilleria.gob.ar