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STORY HEADLINE: Olympians and Paralympians call on world leaders to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines

LOCATION: Olympic House, Lausanne, Switzerland
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LANGUAGE: English

STORY SCRIPT:
In a video produced by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), athletes are calling on world leaders and decision-makers to ensure free and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. The call comes a few weeks before the start of the Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, which will take place from 4 to 20 February.

Launched today, the video features more than 20 Olympians and Paralympians from all corners of the world.

These include:
Olympic champions Federica Pellegrini (swimming, Italy) and Seung-min Ryu (table tennis, South Korea), three-time Olympic medallist Pau Gasol (basketball, Spain), two-time Olympic medallist Maja Martyna Wloszczowska (cycling, Poland), and Humphrey Kayange (rugby, Kenya), who are all members of the IOC Athletes’ Commission.

Many other Olympic and Paralympic champions are also included:
Olympic champions Valerie Adams (athletics, New Zealand), Alistair Brownlee (triathlon, UK), Osea Kolinisau (rugby, Fiji), Gianmarco Tamberi (athletics, Italy) and IOC President Thomas Bach (fencing); Paralympic champions Martina Caironi (athletics, Italy), Ellie Cole (swimming, Australia), Jakub Krako (Alpine skiing, Slovakia), Tatyana McFadden (athletics, Nordic skiing, USA), Jitske Visser (wheelchair basketball, The Netherlands) and Annika Zeyen (cycling, Germany).

Other athletes featured are: Olympic medallists Danka Bartekova (shooting, Slovakia), PV Sindhu (badminton, India) and Luiza Zlotkowska (speed skating, Poland); Olympians Gaby Ahrens (shooting, Namibia), Jonathan Borlée (athletics, Belgium), Uche Eke (gymnastics, Nigeria), Ann-Christin Goliab (sailing, Germany), Alex Hua Tian (equestrian, China), Niluka Karunaratne (badminton, Sri Lanka), Silvia Mittermüller (snowboarding, Germany), Alexi Pappas (athletics, Greece), Akiko Thomson (swimming, Philippines) and Gabriela Trana (athletics, Costa Rica).

In their message, the athletes stress the importance of staying united to continue to fight the pandemic effectively:
“As athletes, we can bring the world together through the power of sport. Now, more than ever, we stand united to use that power of sport and the Olympic and Paralympic...
Movement to help win the battle against COVID because we go faster, we aim higher, we are stronger when we stand together”.

They continue:
“We have been given a way forward with a safe and effective vaccine that can help save precious lives and protect our friends… and our families. So we call on governments, foundations, philanthropists, health organisations and social businesses to join hands in giving free and equal access to the vaccine for everybody across the world to pledge our collective responsibility to protect those who are the most vulnerable, because everyone on this planet has a right to live a healthy life. We are stronger together when we stand in solidarity and care for each other.”

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, has been joined by world leaders in calling for 70 per cent of the populations of all countries to be vaccinated by the start of July 2022, in order to end the acute phase of the pandemic.

During the IOC Session in Tokyo last year, he told the IOC Members:
“The Olympic Games bring nations of the world together in competition as athletes strive to fulfil the Olympic motto of ‘higher, faster, stronger – together’. The motto applies equally to our struggle against the defining challenge of our time: we must be faster in distributing vaccines all over the world; we must aim higher in vaccinating 70 per cent of all the population of all countries by the middle of next year; we must be stronger in removing every barrier that stands in our way to expedite production; and we must do it all together, in solidarity.”

The IOC and WHO have a Memorandum of Understanding in place in order to advocate healthy lifestyles.

Already in 2020, the IOC had supported the initiative of Noble Peace Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus to make the COVID-19 vaccines a Global Common Good.

President Bach said at the time:
“[I believe in making the COVID-19 vaccines a Global Common Good because if there is one lesson that I hope we all have learned from this global coronavirus pandemic, it is: we need more solidarity. Solidarity within societies and solidarity among societies. Distributing vaccines as a Global Common Good to everyone around the planet will be a great sign of solidarity for all humankind and demonstrate that we are always stronger together.”

Vaccines form one of the main principles of hosting safe Olympic and Paralympic Games, as demonstrated during the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 last summer. They will also form a key part of the COVID-19 countermeasures for the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games Beijing 2022, as outlined in the Playbooks.

The IOC and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) worked closely with the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) to assist their athletes, officials and Games stakeholders residing in their territories to get vaccinated before the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020, and are doing so again now before the participants travel to China in a few weeks.

The IOC has been reiterating the importance of vaccination and encouraged the athletes and Games participants to take the vaccine whenever possible in order to protect not only themselves, but also their communities.
In addition, the IOC produced clips with a number of Olympians during the Games in Tokyo. They call on people to get vaccinated. These clips will be posted on social media following today’s IOC video.

The list includes:
Hamish Kerr (athletics, New Zealand), Hua Tian (equestrian, China), Ken Terauchi (diving, Japan), Viktor Axelsen (badminton, Denmark), Yoshiaki Oiwa (equestrian, Japan), Gianna Woodruff (athletics, Panama), Tsukimi Namiki (boxing, Japan), Sean McColl (climbing, Canada), Sara Slott Petersen (athletics, Denmark), Rusila Nagasau (rugby, Fiji), Sandra Sanchez (karate, Spain) and Hugues Fabrice Zango (athletics, Burkina Faso).

The Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022 will take place from 4 to 20 February 2022 and will be followed by the Paralympic Games from 4 to 13 March 2022.

SHOTLIST:
00:01 Promotional Video: IOC Vaccination Call-Out_Master version 16x9
01:04 Promotional Video: IOC Vaccination Call-Out_Master version 4x5

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