

US urges Tanzania to embrace COVID-19 vaccines, share data

February 26 2021, by Cara Anna

The United States praised Tanzania on Friday for finally acknowledging the resurgence of COVID-19 after claiming for months it had defeated the pandemic through prayer. But the U.S. urged the country to share infection data and accept vaccines.

"It has become clear that the virus variant has arrived in Tanzania," U.S. Ambassador Donald Wright, who is also a doctor, said in a statement. "I've been encouraged by recent statements from the Ministry of Health acknowledging COVID-19 as a public [health](#) priority in Tanzania and urging citizens to take basic precautions."

Tanzania is one of Africa's most populous countries, with some 60 million people, and during its long COVID-19 denial the director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that if the continent isn't united, "it's doomed."

High-profile deaths this month in the East African nation, including that of the vice president of the semi-autonomous island region of Zanzibar, appeared to lead populist President John Magufuli to acknowledge publicly in the past week that COVID-19 was back.

For weeks, Tanzanians had seen a rise in death notices citing breathing difficulties and cases of what health workers called "pneumonia." But countries such as Oman reported Tanzanians arriving in their countries and testing positive for the virus.

Meanwhile, Tanzania's president openly questioned COVID-19 vaccines, without providing evidence. Tanzania is one of the very few countries in Africa that has not signed up for the global COVAX facility to provide vaccines to low- and middle-income countries. Now those vaccines have begun to arrive, in Ghana and Ivory Coast, with more on the way.

The U.S. ambassador's statement urges Tanzania to "convene its health experts and review the evidence on vaccines." He also notes "it is critical to collect and report information about testing and cases."

Tanzania last updated its number of infections last April. That number remains at 509.

Then the ambassador turned to aid: "Here in Tanzania, we dedicated \$16.4 million to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic since the first confirmed case was diagnosed in March of 2020. The United States stands ready to ramp up our efforts and we are committed to working side by side with Tanzania to defeat COVID-19."

An embassy spokesman did not immediately respond to a question about whether further aid depends on Tanzania sharing pandemic data and embracing vaccines.

Tanzania, unlike other African countries, did not lock down during the pandemic and it has promoted that to tourists and others.

In an interview with The Associated Press on Thursday, Tanzania's investment minister, Kitila Mkumbo, asserted that COVID-19 "has not been one of the major concerns of investors." He added that American investors "are waiting for the [pandemic](#) to slow down so movement can begin."

And the minister welcomed the Biden administration, saying he believed

that the U.S. will once again "take global responsibility of supporting developing countries like Tanzania in many aspects, like health."

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