

Working Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina

January 19, 2022

President Joseph R. Biden Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

On May 12, 2021, our Working Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina wrote to you to urge you to provide Covid-19 vaccine support to Bosnia. When we wrote to you, the Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center reported that Bosnia's mortality rate was 4.4%, the 9th highest rate in the world.¹ CNN reported that the citizens of Sarajevo were perishing at a pace that was greater than during the siege, almost twice as many per day.² At that time, less than 1% of the population had been fully vaccinated.³

Therefore, we were very grateful on June 21, 2021, when the US announced that vaccines would be directed to Bosnia and Herzegovina. We were also very grateful more recently when the US donation of 96,000 doses of Moderna vaccine actually arrived in Sarajevo. Your donation is a profoundly important humanitarian gesture. Further, we were gratified to learn of USAID's donation of \$11.2 million in direct and indirect support for medical and public health needs in Bosnia during the pandemic.

While vaccination distribution in Bosnia has improved, with 21.83% of the population fully vaccinated,⁴ the public health situation continues to be very challenging. Bosnia is now ranked 11th in the world for its 4.5% mortality rate in relation to the number of infections. In terms of deaths per 100,000 of the population, Bosnia ranks 3rd highest in the world.⁵

Unfortunately, due to the deteriorating political situation in Bosnia, it continues to be difficult for the country to respond effectively to the pandemic. High Representative Christian Schmidt has reported that as a result of Milorad Dodik's escalating threats to the peace, "Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) faces the greatest existential threat of the postwar period."⁶ Indeed, after years of threats of secession, the Assembly of Republika Srpska voted on December 10 2021, to take steps toward forming its own military and judiciary within six months. In addition, the Assembly of Republika Srpska has voted to separate from the National Medical and Drug Agency.⁷ Such a move, which is unconstitutional, will no doubt lead to shortages of medicines and equipment at the worst possible time.

The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control recently designated Milorad Dodik for sanctions due to the "continued threats to the stability and territorial integrity of BiH" mentioned above.⁸ It is that very political instability fomented by Milorad Dodik that has cruelly exacerbated the public health crisis caused by the pandemic and has put millions of lives at greater risk.

We would like to thank you again for the generous donation of the crucially needed Covid-19 vaccines, and urge you to donate additional vaccines as well as continue to support medical and public health needs in Bosnia. However, given the political crisis, we also urge you to take all necessary measures to defend Bosnia's sovereignty and territorial integrity as a democratic nation under the rule of law. Public support for the binding decisions and final authority of the High Representative as well as additional sanctions against those who threaten the peace will help stabilize the country and enable Bosnia to respond more effectively to the pandemic.

Sincerely,

The Working Group for Bosnia and Herzegovina

¹ "Mortality Analyses," *Johns Hopkins University & Medicine: Coronavirus Resource Center*, May 8, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>.

² Antonia Mortensen and Scott McClean, "The Siege of Sarajevo lasted for years -- now the city's battle with Covid-19 is dragging on with no end in sight," *CNN*, May 1, 2021, <https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/01/europe/sarajevo-covid-siege-deaths-cmd-intl/index.html>.

³ "Overview: Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Johns Hopkins University & Medicine: Coronavirus Resource Center*, May 8, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/bosnia-and-herzegovina>.

⁴ "Overview: Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Johns Hopkins University & Medicine: Coronavirus Resource Center*, May 8, 2021, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/bosnia-and-herzegovina>.

⁵ "Mortality Analyses," *Johns Hopkins University & Medicine: Coronavirus Resource Center*, January 15, 2022, <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/mortality>.

⁶ *60th Report of the High Representative for Implementation of the Peace Agreement on BiH to the Secretary-General of the United Nations*, OHR Office of the High Representative, <http://www.ohr.int/60th-report-of-the-high-representative-for-implementation-of-the-peace-agreement-on-bosnia-and-herzegovina-to-the-secretary-general-of-the-united-nations/>.

⁷ "Bosnian Serb Entity Passes New Law Seen As Undermining Country's Constitution," *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, Oct. 20, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/republika-srpska-constitution-/31521433.html>.

⁸ "Treasury Sanctions Milorad Dodik and Associated Media Platform for Destabilizing and Corrupt Activity," Jan. 5, 2022, U.S Department of the Treasury, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0549>.