

## CIVIL SOCIETY DRAGS GOVERNMENT TO COURT OVER REQUIREMENT TO HAVE NATIONAL ID CARD BEFORE RECEIVING COVID 19 VACCINE

### PRESS RELEASE

March 5, 2020, **Kampala- Uganda**: Civil society led by the [Initiative for Social and Economic Rights \(ISER\)](#) and [Unwanted Witness](#) have dragged government to court over the mandatory [requirement by the Ministry of Health](#) for Ugandans to present either national identification card (NIC) or national identification Number (NIN) before receiving COVID 19 vaccines.

Vaccines for COVID 19 have been recommended as the quickest way to curb the pandemic and ease the strain on the health system and economy. The Government of Uganda in its latest briefing revealed it plans to start vaccination on 10 March following receipt of initial doses from COVAX, starting with health workers, those over 50, those under 50 with pre-existing conditions, teachers, security forces. The doses will be given eight weeks apart and all persons vaccinated will receive a vaccination card.

“ISER has cautioned government in a number of [policy briefs](#) on [COVID 19 Vaccines](#) that insisting on national IDs as a pre-requisite to access the COVID 19 vaccine would exclude millions of Ugandans. According to available data from NIRA as of March 2021, 6,519,629 Ugandans over 16 years do not have national IDs and therefore would miss out on the vaccine,” said Allana Kembabazi, Program Manager, ISER. “Getting a national ID is often a protracted process. As the pandemic rages, it does not discriminate between those with national IDs and those without. Why is the government doing so when it should be doing everything possible to contain this pandemic? We have neither required NICs nor NINs for vaccination before. Why now?”, adds Allana Kembabazi.

On the day the first batch of COVID 19 vaccines arrive in the country, the dual organisations in their law suit filed in the High Court, argue that it is illegal, irrational, unfair and discriminatory to condition COVID-19 vaccination on possession of NIN or NIC. They ask court to halt the requirement to have a NIC or NIN in order to receive a vaccine. For instance, **NAMUSOKE RESITETUTA**, aged 78 years, resident of Kakuza village, Kyangu parish, Kalisizo subcounty, Kyotera district, narrates that she has never received her NIC nor NIN since the commencement of the mass registration.

“Where does government get this authority from? The Constitution is clear about non-discrimination. Under **Section 66(2)** of the Registration of Person’s Act, 2015, possession of a NIC or NIN is not a pre-requisite to receive health services, including COVID vaccines,” said Salima Namusobya, ISER’s Executive Director. “You cannot pre-condition the enjoyments of basic rights like life and health on whether or not someone has a NIC or NIN. This sets a dangerous precedent that will further exclusion in access to social services among Ugandans. We have already witnessed the challenges government has faced implementing this requirement with regard to Senior Citizens Grant where so many older persons continue to be excluded for lack of ID.” Emphasized Salima Namusobya.

“As our research report, [Uganda’s Digital ID system: A Cocktail of Discrimination](#) found, insisting on national IDs has become a tool of surveillance by the state and non-state actors, with regards to who to “include” and “exclude” depending on the political, social and economic aspects. This prohibits citizens from accessing vital services,” noted Dorothy Mukasa of Unwanted Witness. “Of the population we sampled, 88% had submitted registration forms but were yet to receive an ID, waiting for a period of over six months” added Dorothy Mukasa.

Civil society cautions government to instead focus on rolling out COVID 19 Vaccines to everyone eligible as soon as possible and to engage with communities rather than impose additional barriers.

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