

F1 Jean Pierre Okandjo Okito Loma

Speaker1: My colleague, my friend, it is the ninth day of March 2022. It is now ten minutes past 11:00. I am in my office at JICA which stands for Japan International Cooperation Agency. Located on Avenue de la Justice number 36 in the commune of Gomé, city of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the background, I hear the voice of my colleague and friend, Dr. Nicodemus, whom I affectionately call Kani, with whom I have been sharing the same office for a few years, talking on the phone: "Hi Pauline. As discussed before. That's it, Dr. Jean-Pierre, JP and I got approval from our hierarchy to go to the Central Congo province in Matadi to support the Covid 19 vaccination campaign. To that end, I plan to go get my Covid 19 test at the usual place, as per the house guidelines for those not yet vaccinated against Covid 19." Kani's phone is in handheld mode, allowing me to passively follow Pauline's response in these words.

Speaker2: "Oh Kani! Another trip to Matadi. How many days do you plan to spend in this city, which is second only to Kinshasa in terms of reported cases of Covid 19?"

Speaker1: Kani responds in just seven days. Pauline continues.

Speaker2: "Oh my God, I can't believe it. Seven days is really huge. If it were up to me, I would give you just three days, no more, or cancel your trip altogether. Because I believe that the longer the exposure time in this danger zone, the higher the risk of contracting the disease. Tell me, is Dr. JP vaccinated yet?" Dr. Kani answers "yes."

Staring desperately at me, giving the impression of someone who is annoyed by this question, Kani continues her words. "Hey Pauline, why are you worried about me? Personally, I am not afraid of anything. My faith is greater. Besides, I don't think it's important to be vaccinated against covid 19. I am convinced that this vaccine has more harmful effects than beneficial, just like what happened to my brother in the church, and everything that is said about this vaccine. In short, don't talk to me about this vaccination." Pauline insists, "Kani, your faith is great, but so is mine. As your wife, it is my right and duty to be concerned about your health because the future of our children depends on it. Kani, listen to me very well, there is no point in stubbornly trying to get vaccinated. In my opinion, you are taking too many risks that you can avoid by getting

vaccinated. Besides, you are a doctor and you know it so well. I don't understand anything new about this subject. Today, I still have to tell you. Your refusal to vaccinate makes me tired and exhausted. This might be the last time I talk about it with you because I feel like I'm in front of an unconscious person. Do what you think is right, with good cheer, bye."

Speaker1: Oh my God! She hung up on me. My skin was flabbergasted. It was as if I had just taken a very cold shower. When I imagine the danger of Covid 19 and the pandemic is not yet over. I feel in my pockets the impression of carrying small pebbles whose weight represents that of a reinforced concrete. I am waiting for the right time to discuss this topic at length with my colleague and friend Kani. All of a sudden, I hear someone trying to open the office door and it's our boss coming back from break with chocolates to raise our blood sugar. As soon as she left, I said to Kani, "Do you have enough evidence to prove that your brother's death in the church was caused by vaccines? This reasoning is wrong because the vaccine has more beneficial effects than harmful ones. In addition, if I have to refer to our field trips to central Congo, how many people did you see die after the Covid 19 vaccination? At some point you have to stop giving false reasons for not vaccinating.

Kani speaks up: "After all it's my life, I can do what I want with it. Do you know that you have nothing to teach me about Covid 19 vaccination? I also know that this vaccine protects, but as far as I am concerned, I do not change my mind. I only confirm my no to vaccination. N.O .N." A strong wind blew through the corridors of the building to such an extent that I took a small moment's respite. My breathing was somewhat shallow. "Dear Kani, remember as of March 9, 2022, the country has recorded 86,410 confirmed cases and 1,335 deaths from Covid 19. Approximately 200 doctors and other health care professionals have died in the Democratic Republic of Congo since the COVID 19 pandemic began. Among them are our great teachers who could not be buried with dignity, in accordance with what they did for this country and for the world, because of the respect of the barrier gestures. No more than fifteen people at the funeral. The head of division of the Lomami health province, where you worked for three and a half years, died of Covid 19. Dear friend, this situation cannot leave you indifferent, knowing that vaccination is still a powerful weapon against this pandemic and that it prevents severe forms." This day takes on a special character for me as I assess the level of Covid 19 risk my friend is running and see that I can't change his mind. My dear friend Kani, I

remember the good old days of our friendship. At that time, a certain Mrs. Anita appreciated your services as her attending physician. You saved her life during a difficult delivery when we were at the general referral hospital in Kananga around 2005. The population had a good testimony on your behalf that your work was always neat and of quality. You ensure a good reception to the patients. You are never tired and always ready to save lives. I too, JP, have a very good image of you and I encourage you to continue on this line, that is to say to continue to save human lives despite our differences on the vaccination against Covid 19. I reassure you that you remain my friend. We must continue our mission for which we took an oath, to work as a team to save lives regardless of tribe, ethnicity, religion, gender, standard of living, race, age, physical or mental condition, wherever they may be in our country and around the world.

Three months later, we're in the office and I say, "Kani, am I still coughing? I hope for your sake this isn't the beginning of covid 19, right?" He starts laughing out loud, then replies, "No, it's not covid 19. Besides, my tests have always been negative JP ." "In any case, I doubt the quality of the tests that are used in the structure where you frequent. It's possible that you are a false negative. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha! No I'm not serious Kani, I'm just kidding but I advise you to change your structure soon. In the end, despite our differing views, dear Kani, I assure you that we will remain united as usual and determined to be able to save human lives wherever the work takes us."