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London, April 2 (RHC)-- More than 70 legislators, including 41 MPs from Prime Minister Boris Johnson's ruling Conservative Party, have said they would oppose so-called vaccine passports in a rare show of cross-party unity in the United Kingdom.

The UK, like several other countries, is considering making such certificates mandatory to help to open the economy as it starts lifting COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. "We oppose the divisive and discriminatory use of COVID status certification to deny individuals access to general services, businesses or jobs," said the statement published by the opposing legislators on Friday.

Notable figures such as MP Iain Duncan Smith, a former leader of the Conservatives, and former head of the opposition Labour Party's Jeremy Corbyn were among those who signed the pledge. Civil liberties groups Liberty, Big Brother Watch, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) and Privacy International also gave their backing to the statement.

Silkie Carlo, director of Big Brother Watch, said: "Our common goal is to emerge from lockdown – healthy, safe and free. But we won't arrive at freedom through exclusion." "Covid passes would be the first attempt at segregation in Britain for many decades, dividing communities without reducing the risks.

"We are in real danger of becoming a check-point society where anyone from bouncers to bosses could demand to see our papers. We cannot let this Government create a two-tier nation of division, discrimination and injustice."

Shami Chakrabarti, former head of Liberty and ex-shadow attorney general, also signed the statement. She said: "International travel is a luxury but participating in your own community is a fundamental right. So internal COVID passports are an authoritarian step too far. We don't defeat the virus with discrimination and oppression but with education, vaccination and mutual support."

The government is considering asking people to show proof of a COVID-19 vaccination to access crowded spaces such as pubs or sports events. PM Johnson has previously said a certificate is likely to be needed for international travel.

The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported on Saturday that trials of COVID passports would begin within weeks at sports events and possibly a music awards ceremony. A final decision on the introduction of certificates is yet to be taken.

Johnson has instructed senior minister Michael Gove to review their possible role, saying there are ethical issues to explore. But on Friday, Johnson gave his clearest indication yet that the government would move ahead with vaccine passports.

He said businesses would have more confidence if it was clearer whether people have had the infection, vaccination or had a COVID-19 test. "So those three things working together will, I think, be useful for us as we go forward," Johnson said.

His comments came amid mounting questions over the prospect of vaccine certificates.

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