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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

Last night President MC Ramaphosa announced that the COVID-19 outbreak has been declared a national state of disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act. This is in recognition of its magnitude and severity in our country.

## **LATEST CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19**

Fellow South Africans, as of this morning, South Africa now has 62 confirmed and verified cases of COVID-19. There are more cases but these are yet to be verified.

The details of the cases are as follows:

### **GAUTENG: 7**

- A 33 year old male who had travelled to Spain
- A 68 year old female who had travelled to Austria
- A 30 year old male who had travelled to India
- A 39 year old male who had travelled to the US
- A 43 year old female who had travelled to the US

- A 50 year old male who had travelled to France and the UK
- A 37 year old male who had travelled to the US, Dubai and Mexico

#### WESTERN CAPE: 2

- A 39 year old male who had travelled to Canada
- A 15 year old male who had travel travelled to France

#### LIMPOPO: 1

-A 29 year old male who had travelled to France and Netherlands

#### MPUMALANGA:

-A 55 year old male who had travelled to France

We also wish to mention that there are two cases of local transmission which have been presented to the NICD. These are under investigation. We are in the process of conducting confirmation tests and establish their direct contacts and those whom they have subsequently come into contact with.

All the patients have been advised and contact tracing is underway.

#### **SOUTH AFRICANS REPATRIATED FROM WUHAN**

As announced by the President, indeed 114 South Africans were repatriated from Wuhan. The SAA flight landed on Saturday and they have settled in well at the Ranch Hotel in Limpopo.

As we had undertaken to ensure that we will take all the precautionary measures in this repatriation processes, between yesterday and this morning, all these citizens have been swabbed for testing for COVID-19. We now await the outcome of their results. But our medical team has assured us that they found them to be medically fit when they conducted their examinations on them.

Only two citizens had a slight cough but did not show an elevated temperature or any other symptoms. The medical team however took a decision to isolate these two citizens for close and constant monitoring.

We also wish to advise South Africans that when our citizens were boarding in Wuhan, medical screening was conducted on each and everyone of them. This was done by both the South African and Chinese authorities. Of the citizens that had presented themselves for repatriation, 4 had to remain behind. This is because they displayed some symptoms. It must be highlighted that this does not mean that they have been infected but this was done to mitigate the risk of having an infected person on the same flight with more than 100 others and thus exposing them.

We know that this may have negatively affected our citizens and their families who have now been informed. The Department of Social Development is offering support and counselling to the families and the embassy also continues to communicate with the 4 citizens as they remain in self quarantine in Wuhan.

### **A BRIEF OF CLINICAL ANALYSIS FOR THIS OUTBREAK**

It is important to alert all our citizens that individuals with other existing medical conditions such as chronic lung disease and immune suppression are more vulnerable and may experience severe symptoms if infected with COVID-19.

Secondly, the overall fatality rate of COVID-19 is estimated to be 1-3%.

Approximately 15% of those who develop disease require hospitalisation. Most cases, that is about 85% can self quarantine at home. In this regard the clinicians observing the patient will make this determination and advise if they view the patient as high risk and therefore requiring hospital admission or can recover from home.

Epidemiological evidence from affected countries shows that:

- Containment is only possible at very early stages, and even then, is difficult
- Mitigation of risks is eventually the most pragmatic response and should start early
- Delayed early action could overwhelm the health system.
- While early action may be unpalatable to others and may even negatively affect other areas such as the economy, it is necessary.

It is against this clinical background that we appreciate the leadership provided by the President to announce stringent measures such as shutting down some of our borders, banning travel to high risk countries and prohibiting gathering of more than 100 people.

We will now also restrict visits in hospitals and prisons.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS PARTNERING WITH GOVERNMENT**

We must acknowledge the cooperation and partnership by various stakeholders, including the private sector, NGOs and Labour.

Our private sector has committed to assisting and availing resources to government to set up tracking, tracing and monitoring facilities. It has been proven that those countries that experienced early spikes in the pandemic, these facilities had not been set up and this remains an important element to reducing public transmission.

Some hotel groups have since come forward to offer support by providing accommodation that will be used as quarantine facilities.

We are intensifying our testing mechanisms. have also received support to improve the testing process. A solid collaboration between the private and public laboratories is very important. This will ensure that there are no delays in receiving test results.

The private sector has also made other commitments that are still being structured and will be announced in due course

We also appreciate governments that have expressed their willingness to lend their support and partner with us as a country. These discussions are currently taking place and we will also make them public once concluded in due course.

## WAY FORWARD

The President announced that a National Command Council has been formed. The Ministers team of Ministers present here form part of that Council. Each Minister will identify areas that fall within their department that require focus so that all sectors of our society are well attended to.

We must alert all South Africans that the internal transmission risk is now setting in. Once this infection starts spreading in taxis and buses, it will create a new dynamic. The reality is this, for now, individuals that have been infected thus far are people who can afford going on holiday abroad or they travel for business. Those individuals also have accommodation to self-quarantine. However, when this outbreak starts affecting our poor communities where families do not have enough rooms or spaces to quarantine those infected, we will experience a crisis. Therefore, it is important for us to start preparing accommodation for such an eventuality. This means that patients who do not necessarily require to be admitted in hospital, they will be placed in those quarantine facilities identified by government. We are appealing to provinces to start preparing possible quarantine sites. I have communicated this to all Health MECs at our meeting.

As government we will continue to assess the progression of this outbreak. The next few weeks are critical. It will be on the basis of that situational analysis that government will decide if the measures that have been put in place are sufficient or we may be required to take further steps, being guided by the country's legislation.

Fellow South Africans, it is now time for us to turn ourselves into soldiers. In military terms there are three steps that are put in operation in times of war:

1. Preparations – This includes:
  - Training of health workers on coronavirus
  - Preparing health facilities
  - Setting up Teams for testing in laboratories
  - Setting up Effective Tracing Teams
  - Reviewing protocols for treatment
  
2. Reconnaissance – This includes:
  - Collecting data on coronavirus globally and in South Africa
  - Assess the conduct of the virus, clinical manifestation, mortality
  - Look at the trend of the infection, ie. Imported and local transmission
  
3. Hard Combat – This includes:
  - Increased testing capability
  - Management of infected people
  - Quarantine of contacts
  - Community mobilisation on stopping the spread of the virus
  - Increase hygiene: constant washing of hands with soap and water, using sanitisers

As South Africans, we all have to work together to fight this outbreak. We need not panic and be engulfed by fear, but at the same time we cannot be complacent.

We do believe that together we can conquer this outbreak.

Dr Zwelini Mkhize  
Minister of Health

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