

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



THE PRESIDENCY

**STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
DR. HAGE G. GEINGOB ON THE OCCASION OF THE ADDRESS TO THE NATION
ON THE COVID-19 NATIONAL RESPONSE**

JULY 31, 2020

WINDHOEK

Check Against Delivery

Fellow Namibians, Good Afternoon.

There are now more than 17 million known cases of COVID-19 across the world and as of today, 2 129 cases confirmed in Namibia. Namibia's rate of daily new cases has risen to the 4th highest on the continent; following South Africa at No. 1, Eswatini at No. 2 and Gabon at No. 3, respectively.

The pandemic is changing rapidly in our country. It took 4 months to record 1,000 cases. However it has taken only 14 days to record 2, 000 cases in the country, of which over 95 percent are all from Walvis Bay.

From the onset of this pandemic, I have maintained that the health of Namibians is our biggest priority. It is therefore highly regrettable that to date, we have lost 10 Namibians, who succumbed during July 2020. Of the 10 fatalities, 9 were from Walvis Bay and yesterday, Windhoek recorded its first COVID-19 related death. I express, on behalf of the Government and the Nation at large, our deepest sympathy to the bereaved families who bear the loss of their loved ones under very difficult circumstances. As much as health imperatives demand for physical distancing, this is the time to empathize and provide solace to one another. May God comfort all who mourn.

There are now confirmed cases in 12 regions across the country, with the exception of the Kavango West and Omaheke. While Community Transmission was confirmed at Walvis Bay in mid-June 2020, there has been a steady in-

crease in the number of cases in Windhoek, and community transmission is now suspected in both the Khomas and Kharas regions.

With the rising number of cases in the country, the public needs to be assured that government is putting in place all necessary measures to respond to the situation. We will continue to do everything in our power to mitigate the impact of this pandemic.

Government is continuously strengthening the public health sector and national testing capacity. A total of 27,785 tests have been conducted as part of the Targeted Mass Testing and active case search. This represents a testing ratio of 10.1 people per 1,000, which is among the highest, not only in Africa, but the world. Although we have made a considerable improvement in clearing the testing backlog, we continue to experience delays in testing and disclosure of results, owing to the large volumes of samples. To increase the national testing capacity that currently stands at an average of 1,150 tests per day, we have expanded laboratory capacities at Windhoek, Keetmanshoop and Oranjemund. Next week we will commission new testing laboratories at Walvis Bay and Oshakati, which will significantly boost our capacity and ability to quarantine and isolate positive cases, sooner.

With the rising number of infections, Cabinet has approved the recruitment of more Health Professionals to strengthen our national response. Some development cooperation partners have also availed health workers and experts to

support our response. We sincerely appreciate our medical personnel and other frontline workers who risk their lives on a daily basis to serve their fellow countrymen and women.

Erongo Region is currently the epicenter in our fight against this invisible enemy. The current STAGE 3 level of restriction is due to lapse at midnight on Monday 3 August 2020. I hereby inform the nation that the Erongo Region and the special dispensation for the Local Authority Areas of Walvis Bay, Swakopmund and Arandis will remain unchanged and is hereby extended from Tuesday 4 August until midnight on Monday 31 August 2020.

The other 13 regions of the country will remain under STAGE 4 level of restrictions, with the following revised measures to curb the spread of the virus:

- 1. Public gatherings are reduced from 250 to 100 persons.**
- 2. The sale of alcohol is to remain on a takeaway basis and for consumption in private dwellings, shebeens and bars. For restaurants and hotels, on-site consumption of alcohol is permitted, as per the current arrangements under STAGE 4.**
- 3. Contact sports will be permitted, but no spectators allowed. Unregistered sports activities that draw crowds must be discouraged in the communities.**

- 4. The public must strictly adhere to the regulations and Health & Hygiene protocols, which are our first line of defense. Members of the public must:**
 - (a) Wear a mask at all times in public spaces;**
 - (b) Maintain social distancing;**
 - (c) Avoid crowded public gatherings; and**
 - (d) Avoid unnecessary travel to and from different parts of the country.**
- 5. These revised measures under STAGE 4 come into effect from midnight, 3 August 2020 to midnight 17 September 2020.**
- 6. The Ministry of Health and Social Services will increase public education and information dissemination to arm the public with the information and knowledge to protect themselves and their families against this virus.**

The face-to-face mode of instruction is suspended for Early Childhood Development, preprimary and Grades 1 to 9, across the country from 4 August 2020, for 28 days. Grades 10, 11 and 12 will be permitted to continue with face-to-face instruction. These difficult decisions were arrived at, in consideration of the vulnerability and risks associated with the spread of the virus.

With regard to Tertiary Institutions where ICT infrastructures are adequate to enable online teaching, learning will continue remotely. Vocational Education Training Providers will continue with face-to-face education for the specified period and as provided for under the current Regulations.

Today, we will also announce adjustments to our Quarantine and Isolation Protocols. The Minister of Health and Social Services will provide the details on the revised strategy.

We assure the public that as the pandemic evolves in our country, Government will continue to monitor and adjust the national response, if and when necessary.

Fellow Namibians,

On Sunday evening, July 26, 2020, the nation witnessed in shock and disbelief, the spread of a fire that eventually destroyed an estimated 153 dwellings at Twaloloka Informal Settlement, Walvis Bay. The inferno claimed the life of a toddler; left one resident hospitalized with severe burns and has left over 350 of our people homeless and vulnerable.

As a President committed to fighting and eliminating the scourge of poverty in our country, I have to admit that this incident has hit at my core, not as a leader, not as a politician, but as a human being. What happened at Twaloloka is something that affects the human conscience as we witnessed a community that was already among the worst affected by the pandemic, grappling with unspeakable loss and pain.

Prior to the fire outbreak at Twaloloka settlement and pursuant to my directive issued on 6 July 2020, Government had commenced with the implementation of the Informal Settlement Decongestion Strategy. Governor Neville Andre and the regional leadership were in the process of identifying suitable venues and facilities to relocate residents from densely populated informal settlements at Walvis Bay, in a broader effort to mitigate the spread of the virus among the community.

In the aftermath of the fire, Government has availed financial resources from the National Emergency Disaster Fund to temporarily re-block Twaloloka and relocate half of the inhabitants to a different location. The National Housing Enterprise has availed land to the Walvis Bay Council for this purpose. Building materials will be purchased by Government for the affected residents in order to accelerate the process of relocation.

Government together with the Red Cross has provided relief assistance through the provision of 108 tents; 350 mattresses and blankets; kitchen sets; meat and food essentials. These contributions have been augmented by the generous and selfless donations made by private and corporate citizens from across the country. It is indeed in times of crisis that true character is revealed. I have been heartened by the benevolence, solidarity and spirit of unity at work. While there are those few who have tried to capitalize on this terrible incident for political point scoring, we have seen true humanitarians and patriots emerge, in the spirit of Harambee. Such actions reveal that we

have truly embraced each other as brothers and sisters in the Namibian House, irrespective of race, tribe, gender and social standing.

The affected residents continue to face shortages and I encourage those who have the means to render support through the Office of the Prime Minister.

I stated in my Address of 22 June 2020, Government's intention to conduct a targeted International Tourism revival initiative from 15 July 2020, in collaboration with industry. Following a lengthy consultation process, the initiative has now been approved to commence from Monday, 3 August 2020, subject to the agreed protocols. The details of the modalities are to be finalized by a National Task Team that is to be constituted by the Line Minister, comprising of sector representatives and key institutions.

Among the salient points to highlight are that international tourists arriving in Namibia will be required to present a 72 hour negative Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) Test Result.

Tourists will not be subjected to a mandatory quarantine. They will however be required to remain at their first initial destination in the country, for a period of 7 days. A test will be conducted during this period and the tourist will be permitted to proceed with their holiday on Day 7, provided the test result is negative. The modalities have been carefully negotiated and agreed upon, so as to achieve the dual objective of stimulating our tourism sector and safeguarding public health. Continuous assessments will be conducted

throughout this trial, which will inform and strengthen preparations for the imminent reopening of Points of Entry under STAGE 5.

We are at a critical stage. At this moment in our battle with this invisible enemy, all Namibians are called upon to embrace the principles of humanity. There will be a time and place where we will discuss our ideological and political differences but now is not the time. To capitalize on the misfortune and demise of our people in the interest of scoring political points is nothing but pure recklessness.

We have seen that in countries where societies have adopted a unified approach to tackling the Coronavirus, devoid of politics, there has been success in containment and reduction of new infections. Let us follow suit, by discarding petty differences and placing Namibian lives as the number one priority.

Government is monitoring the health, social and economic indicators on a daily basis. It is a delicate balancing act to protect the lives and livelihoods of our people, both of which are equally important. The severe restrictions imposed on the movement of people under a lockdown are effective in slowing the spread of the virus. However such severe restrictions need to be sustained over an extended period of time to effectively eliminate the risk of infection.

Our experience has taught us that a full lockdown of social and economic activities comes at an equally high premium and cannot be sustained over a

prolonged period of time. Together as Namibians, we must continue to strengthen our national capacities and adhere to the precautionary measures that will safeguard lives, both today and tomorrow.

I therefore reassure you, fellow Namibians, that Government will utilize the full lockdown strategy sparingly and perhaps only when it becomes absolutely necessary.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once stated, "A time of crisis is not just a time of anxiety and worry. It gives a chance, an opportunity, to choose well or to choose badly." As Namibians, who together with the rest of the world face an unprecedented crisis, let us overcome our anxiety and worry by choosing well. Let us make the right decisions, the right choices and the right measures, in the interest of the health and prosperity of our nation.

I Thank You