



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Statement by President Cyril Ramaphosa and leaders of political parties represented in Parliament on the Coronavirus outbreak, Tuynhuys, Cape Town

18 March 2020 - 10:45am

The Deputy President David Mabuza and I met this morning with the leaders of all parties represented in Parliament on the global coronavirus pandemic.

All leaders agree that the COVID-19 outbreak poses a grave and real threat to the lives, livelihoods and prosperity of our people.

Our country finds itself in an extreme situation that requires extraordinary measures.

It requires that all South Africans work together in unity and solidarity, in partnership and cooperation.

It is therefore both appropriate and significant that the 14 political parties in our Parliament are standing together, across party political divides, to fight this disease together.

We hereby demonstrate practically that we are united as the leaders of our nation to overcome this global crisis facing our country and our people.

Regardless of our political differences, all leaders share a common desire to keep our people safe, to mitigate the impact on our economy, and ensure that the inevitable disruption to lives and livelihoods is reduced.

We accept our collective and individual duty as leaders to provide guidance and direction to our people, to demonstrate the greatest of care and responsibility in our pronouncements and actions, and to mobilise all South Africans behind this effort.

During the course of our discussions, we agreed on the following principal issues:

- The severity of the COVID-19 threat requires an exceptional response that draws on all the resources and capabilities of our nation; that this response needs to be immediate and that it needs to be sustained. We therefore support the measures that government has announced.
- Our overwhelming concern must be for the health and the well-being of all South Africans, particularly the poor, the elderly and the vulnerable. The actions we take and the decisions that we make must be informed by this imperative.
- While COVID-19 poses a great threat to our nation, we are not helpless. There is much we can do, as a country and as individual citizens, to slow the spread of the disease, to save lives and improve health outcomes, and to bring the epidemic to an end. Every person, institution and grouping has a role to play in combating this disease.

- An effective popular campaign against this disease depends on the provision of regular and accurate information to the public; and access for all to screening, testing and treatment. It demands transparency and accountability from the responsible authorities.
- An effective response also requires heightened levels of personal responsibility on the part of citizens. This includes personal infection control measures such as regular hand washing, avoiding public gatherings and maintaining a distance from other people.
- Personal responsibility also means that we should avoid behaviour – such as unnecessary physical contact or excessive alcohol use – that increases the chances of infection. We should be alert to disinformation, rumour and fake news and ensure that we do not disseminate it.
- We call on all citizens to refrain from making excessive purchases. It is important to understand that the supply of goods remains continuous, supply chains remain intact, and there is no need for stockpiling of any items.
- All social partners – specifically government, business and labour – need to jointly develop and implement measures to mitigate the economic effects of COVID-19. Companies in distress need to be assisted and jobs and livelihoods need to be preserved.

We appreciate the understanding and cooperation of all South Africans in the face of extremely disruptive measures. We commend the actions taken by a broad range of institutions, associations, businesses and religious groupings to reduce the exposure of their members, supporters and employees to infection.

We congratulate the entire team responsible for repatriating South Africans from Wuhan and for caring for them during their quarantine, and welcome the news that they have all tested negative for the virus.

This is an opportunity to give practical effect to nation building by assisting the poor and vulnerable in our society.

Other issues raised by party leaders in the meeting include:

- The need to provide water to destitute communities;
- a greater focus on prevention in the public transport system;
- consideration of various measures to support businesses, such as a UIF contribution holiday and accelerated processing of VAT refunds;
- a particular focus on food security, particularly for the poor;
- a proposal for the departments of Health and Defence to establish centres for testing, water distribution and services, especially in rural areas.

These and several other proposals from political parties will be considered by the National Command Council and the relevant state institutions.

As the collective political leadership of this country we are at one on the extent of the challenge our nation faces, and on the measures that we must now all take to confront and overcome that challenge.

If we act now, and if we act together, we can change the course of this epidemic, and ensure that our country emerges from this ordeal more united, more determined and more able to build the South Africa we want.

