

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON

UPDATE ON ZAMBIA'S LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS FOR THE CORONAVIRUS

BY

THE HON. MINISTER OF HEALTH, DR CHILUFYA, MP

Mr Speaker, I thank you profusely for allowing me this opportunity to update this august House, and through this House the nation, on the novel coronavirus known as the COVID-19 outbreak.

Sir, the outbreak of the COVID-19 disease started in December 2019 and was epic-centred in China in Wuhan City of Hubei Province. Today, the disease has spread geographically to affect eighty countries and territories. This has affected 93,186 individuals and claimed 3,219 deaths by six o'clock this morning.

Mr Speaker, Zambia has not recorded a case of the coronavirus, however, because of the ease of spread of the virus, Zambia has escalated its level of alertness to maximum. To this effect, His Excellency, Edgar Chagwa Lungu, President of the Republic of Zambia, summoned an emergency Cabinet meeting yesterday at which an emergency contingency fund of K50 million was set up to enhance preparedness for the coronavirus.

Sir, Zambia has enhanced surveillance at all its ports of entry. With the setup of the contingency emergency fund, we will now enhance the Zambia National Public Health Institute and its partners and other line ministries to strengthen the response, strengthen preparedness and ensure that public health security is enhanced.

Mr Speaker, the call to action in the response plan that will be enhanced through this emergency fund will enhance the level of personal hygiene. We make a call to all individuals to enhance infection prevention at a personal level by enhancing personal levels of hygiene. We further urge all local authorities to ensure their jurisdictions are cleaned up thoroughly. We further urge individuals who may be having flu to ensure they cover the nose and the mouth as they sneeze.

We call upon all managers of public workplaces to ensure hand washing facilities are available at their places of work. We further call upon all associations that operate in congregate settings to ensure the presence of sanitizers and hand washing facilities every time they are doing what they do.

Sir, Zambia is a signatory of the internal health regulations of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and we note with concern sentiments attributed by some leaders in the political sphere that we must bar Chinese from travelling to Zambia and vice-versa. This is called social stigma, xenophobia and discrimination. It is an affront to internal health regulations and must be condemned in the strongest terms.

Mr Speaker Zambia will operate within the internal health guidelines and follow guidance from the WHO as it responds to this outbreak. I, therefore, call for unity of purpose as we fight the coronavirus which must be evident both at home and globally. Zambia commiserates with China and all countries globally that have lost lives due to the coronavirus. Further, Zambia will work with all international partners to ensure that the global and local response is enhanced.

Sir, let me use this opportunity to thank our many partners that have worked with us in strengthening our response including the American Centre for Disease Control, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Chinese Centre for Disease Control, the United Nations (UN) through the WHO, the Public Health Institute of England and the Africa Centre for Disease Control.

Let me address the issue of our students in domiciled in China. Our position as Government is that we will not repatriate students from China, but we would like to assure the public, the parents and the citizens that the students in China are very well looked after by the Chinese authorities, by the Zambian embassy in China. We are in constant touch with the authorities to ensure that the welfare is enhanced.

Mr Speaker, no Zambian has been suspected of contracting the coronavirus since the outbreak. Mr Speaker, to further strengthening our response, we have embarked on a process to sign a

statutory instrument that will make corona virus disease the COVID-19 notifiable and furthermore that will help us enforce quarantine laws for those who we decide to quarantine.

Mr Speaker, as I conclude, allow me to emphasise that all our entry points at our airports, land and sea ports have been re-enforced with surveillance staff. We have stock piled materials that we call personal protective equipment and with the setup of the contagious fund we shall still pile some more. Training of rapid responders is ongoing and has we speak we training in Lusaka, Chirundu and the Copperbelt. Zambia remains on high alert and is prepared for COVID-19 response.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.
