



ZAMBIA'S SECOND WAVE OF COVID-19: A CALL TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

PRESS STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On the 21st of January 2021, Zambia recorded 1,264 new cases of COVID-19 out of 10,523 tests conducted with 12 deaths and 1,747 recoveries. Cumulatively, the number of tests stood at 806,196, recorded cases at 42,213 with 31,522 recoveries. Total deaths were recorded at 597 with 345 classified as COVID-19 associated deaths and 233 as COVID-19 deaths and 19 pending classification. Total active cases stood at 10,094 as announced by the Ministry of Health.

From the time that Zambia recorded its first two cases in March 2020, much of the virus was contained within the capital. In the span of a few months, many cases emerged in major towns such as Kafue, Ndola, Nakonde and Livingstone, which led to lockdown in order to conduct massive testing on residents. Although cases were recorded each month after March, the infection rate was stable before increasing during the cold season. Thereafter it decreased once more which led to citizens becoming complacent towards the prevention measures. By September 2020, the number of districts affected by the pandemic increased from 68 to 96 as of 30 November 2020.

Recent statistics between the 1st of December 2020 and the 21st of January 2021 show that cases have been soaring as the second wave makes its mark globally. **The increase in the number of cases and deaths has seriously raised Government's concerns, considering the social and economic impacts the country had experienced throughout the course of 2020.** With the current number of active cases on the rise, one would fear the strain this will have on health facilities, and if at all the available facilities will be enough to accommodate patients in critical condition.

Beyond its effects on the health of Zambian citizens, COVID-19 has had significant economic effects. Zambia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was revised downwards from an initial positive growth of at least 3% to a new forecast indicating negative growth of around -4.2%. In 2020, the agriculture, mining and tourism sectors all took significant hits as a result of the pandemic. **Heading into 2021, the Minister of Finance Dr. Bwalya Ng'andu estimates a real GDP growth rate of at least 1.8%. However, the attainment of this will largely depend on how the global economy performs, Zambia's ability to keep the virus at bay and how well companies across the country can maintain "normal" operations. In order to respond to the economic impact of COVID-19, Government has drawn up a robust multi-Sectoral approach that it will continue to develop and re-evaluate as the situation changes.**

The recent strain of the virus is thought to be more contagious and fast-spreading thus Government is concerned with the laxity of citizens' adherence to prescribed measures to contain and mitigate the spread. Rigorous measures to try and curb the spread of the pandemic were employed last year which included: wearing of face masks, sanitizing hands regularly, disinfecting surfaces, discouraging the public from visiting crowded places and observing social distancing of about 1-2 meters, among others. **More stringent measures included restrictions on foreign travel, quarantines for symptomatic travellers returning from high risk countries as well as the closure of learning institutions and certain businesses.**

The recent surge in cases has resulted in increased public anxiety and uncertainty as to what more stringent measures will be implemented by the Government and their socio-economic impacts on individual households and society at large. The Ministry of Health is hard pressed to increase testing capacity, surveillance and mitigation strategies amidst low public compliance on preventative measures across the country to avert the potential of a deadlier strain of the virus as exhibited in the second wave. **The onus is on us as individuals to adhere to the Ministry of Health guidelines in order to ensure our own safety and that of everyone around us.**

This is therefore a call to collective action for all citizens to intensify adherence efforts to the prescribed measures in order to protect citizenry and compliment Government's efforts in mitigating the spread of the virus, as we await a vaccine. **PMRC would like to commend the President of the Republic of Zambia, Dr. Edgar Chagwa Lungu on his precautionary statement on the need to ensure safety of proposed vaccines before they are administered to the Zambian citizenry.**

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