



73rd WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY (18-19 May 2020)

AGENDA ITEM IV: GENERAL DISCUSSIONS IN PLENARY SESSION

SIERRA LEONE STATUS OF READINESS ON COVID-19

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF HEALTH AND SANITATION, REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE

Mr. President, Director General, Excellencies,

Sierra Leone is pleased to participate in this virtual meeting of the 73rd WHA and wishes to congratulate the secretariat for making this possible amidst the COVID-19 global situation. Let me convey my President, H. E. Dr. Julius Maada Bio's best wishes for a successful meeting.

Since WHO declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), the GoSL took many steps in response to this pandemic. We used our Ebola outbreak response experiences to immediately activate the Public Health National Emergency Operation Center (PHEOC) at level 2, even before we recorded the first COVID-19 case. We also convened three One-Health-Inter-Ministerial Committee meetings for policy and strategic guidance.

Among the other early measures we adopted was to conduct an inventory of our existing stock of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Infection, Prevention and Control (IPC) materials and consumables. This exercise identified gaps, especially in the supply chain (forecasting, quantification, procurement, storage, and distribution).

Sierra Leone has put in place an enhanced surveillance system at our three main points of entry (POEs) with the highest risk infection, namely: **Freetown International Airport**, **Gbalamuya** (our land border crossing post with the Republic of Guinea) and **Gendema** (our land border crossing post with the Republic of Liberia).

Sierra Leone is committed to continuing to prevent the importation of the new COVID-19 virus by maintaining vigilance along with our land and

sea crossing points with the deployment of security forces alongside community volunteers. Sierra Leone also continues to maintain a stay at home public health message, keep social distancing if you must leave home, use of face mask, frequent hand washing, and cough etiquette, etc. His Excellency the President took the lead to heighten political leadership in Public Awareness Campaign for signs and symptoms of the disease along with measures of handwashing with soap and water and social distancing.

The above proactive measures have yielded dividends by significantly delaying the importation of COVID-19 into Sierra Leone with the first positive case recorded on 31st March 2020.

Presently the cumulative number of laboratory-confirmed cases steadily increase to 387 as of 13th May 2020, with over 80% of all cases coming from known contacts in quarantine facilities. This demonstrates an efficient mode of contact tracing and mandatory quarantine.

As part of the Standard Operation Procedures for COVID-19 quarantine, isolation, laboratory, and risk communication, Sierra Leone adopted the following:

- established a temporary 14-day mandatory quarantine facility, initially for travelers from China which was later extended to include all travelers from all other countries with 50 and more laboratory-confirmed Covid-19 cases; and
- designated three (3) laboratories with the capacity to perform rapid testing by PCR–fluorescent methodology at **34 Military Hospital, China Sierra Leone Friendship Hospital, and Central Public Health Centre** in Freetown.

Sierra Leone joins the WHO in calling on the rest of the world for more global collaboration and sharing of resources to contain this virus. Sierra Leone’s Ministry of Health and Sanitation, National COVID-19 Response Centre (NCRC), and health development partners stand ready to share its Ebola containment experience and work with global partners to end this COVID-19 menace.

Thank you.

Signed:

Hon. Dr. Alpha Tejan. Wurie (Ass. Prof.)
Minister of Health and Sanitation
Republic of Sierra Leone