



## **73<sup>RD</sup> WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

### **VIRTUAL MEETING**

**18-19 MAY 2020**

### **COVID-19 Country statement for the 73<sup>rd</sup> Virtual Meeting of the World Health Assembly, 18 May 2020**

**Chairperson, Your Excellencies, The Director General Dr Tedros, Ministers**

1. South Africa joins the international community to respond with urgency to the scourge and devastation of COVID-19 and to collectively mourn the loss of life from the virus.
2. As a country, we have not been spared by COVID-19, in fact, we are among those countries that are reporting the highest numbers of cases on the African continent, however, we have managed to keep our case fatality rate low (approximately 1.9%). As of 17 May 2020, cumulatively, we tested 439 559 people with 14 355 positive cases and 261 deaths.
3. The key objective of our COVID-19 response strategy has been to slow down the infection rate through several interventions. By delaying the spread of the disease, we have been able to strengthen the capacity of our health system and put in place wide-ranging public health programmes to better manage the inevitable increase in infections.
4. Using the valuable time, which the lockdown gave us, we have managed to significantly expand our screening and testing programme. In all, our field workers have now screened over 10 million people, and we referred 132 347

for testing. Our strategic approach has been based on saving lives and preserving livelihoods.

- Like other countries we are also experiencing challenges, including the following such as the limited production and distribution of testing and extraction kits by international suppliers,
  - Personal Protective equipment in the form of masks, goggles, bodysuits remain a challenge.
  - Balancing the need to save lives and to ensure that the economy is not affected and people left destitute.
5. We must take the opportunity to appreciate the guidance from the technical experts of the WHO and further commend the sterling leadership of Dr Tedros in these difficult times for the entire globe.
  6. As South Africa, we are pleased to be participating in the Solidary Trial and look forward to using our trial sites to also conduct research on vaccines. We wish to highlight that His Excellency, President Ramaphosa, as the current chair of the African Union joined other global leaders in signing the People's Vaccine Statement, which emphasised that a COVID-19 vaccine be available to everyone on the basis of need and not ability to pay or where the vaccine was produced. This is the real essence of universal health coverage at a global level and an example of real global solidarity.
  7. We as other nations have been tested to the fullest during this pandemic, both from health system and economic perspectives. We have however, become stronger and wiser and believe we will collectively rise again as a nation and a family of nations across the globe and will overcome this disease.
  8. I thank you.