GOUVERNEMENT DE LA
REPUBLIQUE DE LA
VANUATU

MINISTERE DE LA SANTE



GOVERNMENT
OF THE
REPUBLIC OF VANUATU

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

MINISTER OF HEALTH

SEVENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

24 May – 1 June 2021

AGENDA ITEM 17.1 COVID-19 Response

Vanuatu first wishes to express our deepest sympathies for the continued devastation afflicting countries around the world due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Vanuatu remains in a unique position with regards to COVID-19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been only 3 active cases of COVID-19 in the country, all of which have been detected at the border in government-run quarantine facilities. This has been possible through enforcement of border restrictions, pre-travel screening and testing, upon-arrival quarantine along with symptom monitoring and testing, strengthened risk assessment and surveillance processes, and extensive community engagement.

Large numbers of people continue to travel to and from Vanuatu, mainly through worker programs to support farmers and businesses in Australia and New Zealand which in turn enable economic empowerment of Vanuatu families and communities. Since early 2020, workers from all over Vanuatu deployed through these programs have undergone quarantine and testing. Over 23,000 PCR tests have been conducted in Australia and New Zealand on workers from all over Vanuatu and none have detected SARS-CoV-2. In March, a deceased person from an international conveyance found on the beach near the capital city of Port Vila tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. Risk assessments for attending security and health officials confirmed the absence of onwards transmission. We are therefore confident that there have never been any active COVID-19 cases in the community in Vanuatu, and that our prevention and containment measures continue to be effective. The technical guidance provided by WHO throughout this pandemic has been invaluable, along with the critical technical support that has enable us to adapt measures to our unique context.

However, the people of Vanuatu have not been untouched by this horrific pandemic despite the absence of local COVID-19 cases. While traditional lifestyles and subsistence farming are embraced, economic hardship is faced by many especially those who were reliant on international tourism, trade and business. The Government of Vanuatu views COVID-19 vaccination as a key priority to protect the health of our population into the future and to boost our economic recovery by again welcoming visitors to our beautiful country. With the launch of our vaccination campaign imminent, we are working to leverage all available resources within the Ministry of Health and development partners to scale-up rapidly. We

appreciate the support to access vaccines through the COVAX facility as well as through bi-lateral partnerships, such as with China and Australia. We are encouraged that there are new vaccines in the development pipeline that will be well suited to the Vanuatu situation, and we encourage technical transfer to reduce barriers to manufacture so these can be produced at more sites to meet global demand

We remain committed to ensuring continuity of essential health services, and to further progress towards malaria elimination, to tackle the ongoing high burden of non-communicable diseases, to prepare and respond to disease outbreaks such as leptospirosis, and to respond to natural disasters such as those exacerbated due to climate change, including tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis and floods.

Vanuatu expresses gratitude to WHO and other development partners for the ongoing support to collectively protect our country from COVID-19 and other health threats at this challenging time both locally and globally.