

Wednesday, 19th February, 2020

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ON

CORANAVIRUS OUTBREAK

BY

THE MINISTER OF HEALTH, HON. DR CHILUFYA, MP

The Minister of Health (Dr Chilufya): Mr Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to appraise this august House and through this House the nation on the ongoing coronavirus outbreak.

Sir, the Government of the Republic of Zambia, under the leadership of His Excellency Dr Edgar Chagwa Lungu, is transforming the health sector, repositioning it to attain universal health coverage. Integral to this process is a fundamental component of the health systems model that we are pursuing which is called global health with the dichotomy of health security and health diplomacy.

Mr Speaker, health security focuses on protecting the public from all public health hazards. To this effect, the Zambian Government in its transformational agenda has created a Zambia National Public Health Institute as a disease intelligence arm to enhance preparedness and response to any public health hazards.

Given this background, the Government has put interventions to protect the public, through the Zambia National Public Health Institute and its multi-sectoral approach, from contracting the novel coronavirus. The interventions apply to citizens both at home and abroad.

Sir, on 31st December, 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) announced an outbreak of a new strain of coronavirus termed the 2019 novel coronavirus or SARS-CoV-2. This followed a cluster of unusual pneumonia cases reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China. Due to the rapid and wide geographic spread of the virus outside China, aided by the ease of air transport, on 30th January 2020, the WHO declared the outbreak of a global health emergency.

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Mr Speaker, as of 19th February, 2020, the virus has affected more than thirty countries with a total of 74,637 confirmed cases including 2006 deaths recorded globally. On a positive note though, 14,387 have recovered fully.

Sir, China alone has reported about 99 per cent of the confirmed cases and deaths. Africa has recorded and confirmed one case in Egypt and several African countries have investigated suspected cases which have so far tested negative for COVID 19, which is the name that has been given to the novel coronavirus.

Mr Speaker, Zambia has not recorded any case of COVID 19, however, our disease intelligence unit, the Zambia National Public Health Institute, has to date investigated sixteen alerts involving individuals who travelled from China. Laboratory investigations on the respiratory samples from these individuals have all tested negative for the coronavirus. Our surveillance system is active, alert and responding in a timely manner to all threats.

Sir, the virus affects the respiratory system and infected patients present typically with flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, cough and shortness of breath. In more severe cases, pneumonia ensues with complications that include kidney failure and death particularly in those with compromised immunity or pre-existing medical condition. Currently, the infection has no treatment or vaccine, but early supportive therapy is effective.

Mr Speaker, transmission of the infection can be effectively prevented by observing good hygiene including covering coughs and sneezes with a handkerchief or tissue, regular hand washing with soap and clean water, use of alcohol based sanitizers and maintaining a distance of at least one metre from symptomatic individuals.

Mr Speaker, at country level the Ministry of Health through the Zambia National Public Institute has put in place the following measure:

- (a) active surveillance at all points of entry and health facilities including screening of all international travellers with a particular focus with those with a history of contact with persons from areas with confirmed cases. Contact details of those from high risk countries are systematically recorded to aid follow up efforts;
- (b) the National Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC), at the Zambia National Public Health Institute (ZNPHI) is on higher alert and monitoring the situation as the outbreak evolves and the public shall be kept appraised;
- (c) several strategic and technical meetings with multiple stakeholders including Government ministries and agencies, cooperating partners and civil society, continue to be convened to review our preparedness and our response efforts and to mobilise resources. The meetings are at various levels including:
 - (i) at Central Government level where the Secretary to the Cabinet holds meetings fortnightly with all Permanent Secretaries;
 - (ii) Epidemic Preparedness Prevention and Management Committee meetings; and
 - (iii) Technical Committee meetings, coordinated by the ZNPHI
- (d) a contingency plan has been developed. This sets out the basis for coordination and resources mobilisation;
- (e) infection prevention measures are being strengthened at all points of entry and in health care facilities, with procurement of additional supplies of best of protective equipment such as gloves, masks, aprons, disinfectants and hygiene supplies;
- (f) isolation facilities to manage suspected cases have been identified in all districts. For Lusaka, this includes Tubalenge Mini Hospital, and should cases swell the