

**THE FIRST PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BY H.E. NANA AKUFO-ADDO ON GHANA'S
PREPAREDNESS TO RESPOND TO COVID-19**

Wednesday 11th March, 2020

Fellow Ghanaians,

Good evening.

Five days ago, on 6th March, at the Baba Yara Sports Stadium in Kumasi, on the occasion of our nation's 63rd independence anniversary celebration, I gave an update on the measures put in by Government in response to the novel Coronavirus disease which has so far affected some 118,000 people across the world, resulted in the death of some 4,000 persons, and is wrecking havoc on the global economy. WHO has now characterized it as a pandemic.

Prior to the address on 6th March, I had visited the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, the isolation and treatment centers at the Tema General Hospital, and the Ridge Hospital in Accra, to see at first hand part of our state of readiness to deal with the virus should any suspected case be recorded on our shores.

The continuous monitoring of the pandemic has revealed a number of significant developments which require that the nation be brought up to speed on some additional measures we had to take to shore up our response mechanisms.

Fellow Ghanaians, as you may have heard in the news, Burkina Faso our Northern neighbour has confirmed their first two cases of Coronavirus infections. Togo to our East has one confirmed case. Côte d'Ivoire to our West also has one confirmed case.

Several countries in Europe, like Italy where we have quite a large population of Ghanaians have as a result of the surge in infections escalated dramatically their response to the outbreak.

Thus far, our points of entry such as our airports and land borders continue to show satisfactory preparedness to screen all entrants into Ghana. The Ministry of Health has designated a Quarantine facility that can hold infected persons, while all Regional hospitals are preparing Isolation Centres for holding suspected cases.

Our country's two main research institutions, the Nuguchi Memorial Research Institute and the Kumasi Centre for Collaborative Research which have the capacity to investigate and confirm or otherwise suspected cases of Coronavirus infections have been very supportive in this regard. So far, they have found that the 57 suspected cases as of today Wednesday 11th March have proved negative. However, it is imperative that we step up our preparedness to ensure that beyond these initial satisfactory measures we adopt a whole of Ghana approach in adequately preparing for a possible hit within our borders.

In order to do so, at my prompting, the Minister for Finance has made available the cedi equivalent of \$100 million United States Dollars to enhance our Coronavirus

preparedness and response plan. That is to fund the expansion of infrastructure, purchase of materials and equipment and public education.

I have as at yesterday ordered the suspension of all international travels except for critical assignments which would have to be authorized by the Chief of Staff at the Office of the President. All public officials are to remain within the jurisdiction until further notice. Video conferencing facilities and other technological tools are to be utilized whenever possible for international engagements.

I have also instructed further enhancement of the protocols for inbound traffic from already affected countries.

Fellow Ghanaians, all of us should as much as possible desist from all foreign travels except the most critical ones until there is a grip on the virus.

The Ministry of Information is leading a nationwide public education campaign on preventive measures that we must all observe to ensure that we are able to control the spread of the infections should we record any infections in the country which mercifully so far we have not, but which by the law of averages, we shall.

For the time being, a weekly update of the situation will be provided by the Ministry. There will be more frequent updates should the need arise.

I want to reiterate as I indicated on 6th March, and as the Ministry of Health has advised, that we have to revisit our custom of shaking hands and stop doing so completely. And we must cover our mouths when we cough or sneeze.

This fight Fellow Ghanaians, cannot be that of Government alone. It is for all of us. I urge the media to join this cause fully and help disseminate effectively information on the dos and don'ts of the disease. The information to be put out however must be that approved by Health authorities and not from any piece of literature found on the Internet, as false materials are already being spread from other jurisdictions.

I appeal to Civil Society Organisations, schools, universities, Faith-based organizations and places which harbour large gatherings such as classrooms, lecture halls, meetings, parties and funerals to put in place the basic mechanisms to caution and assist patrons on basic preventive measures.

I was encouraged to note that the two well-attended funerals I had participated in over the weekend in Ashanti, people were observing the injunction against shaking hands. All of us need to adjust. Let us continue to observe the basic preventive behaviour - i.e. washing our hands regularly, using alcohol-based hand sanitizers, stopping shaking hands, and avoiding unnecessary close body contact.

Government is analyzing the potential impact to our economy of the virus and would trigger the relevant response to minimize it.

We have begun to engage with the domestic pharmaceutical industry to assist in producing as much of the logistics required to combat and prevent the virus as much as is possible under the circumstances.

Indeed we must take advantage of this crisis to strengthen our domestic production capacity so we can advance our self-reliance and reduce our dependence on foreign imports. Necessity they say is the mother of inventions.

We are grateful to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and friends of Ghana for the assistance they have so far provided and for the pledges made in support of our fight. We shall continue to work with them to defeat the spread of the virus.

I'm confident that together, with all hands on deck, we will be successful in weathering the storm.

May God bless us all and our homeland Ghana and make her great and strong.

I thank you for your attention.