

OFFICIAL OPENING SPEECH
BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR HEALTH, COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT, GENDER, ELDERLY AND CHILDREN IN THE UNITED
REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA HON UMIMY A. MWALIMU (MP)

AT THE OCCASION OF THE EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING FOR MINISTERS OF
HEALTH IN THE SADC REGION ON CORONA VIRUS DISEASE - DAR ES
SALAAM, UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA 9TH MARCH 2020

- Hon. Ministers
- SADC Executive Secretary Dr. Stergomena Lawrence Tax
- WHO Regional Director for AFRO. Dr Matshidiso Moeti,
- Chairperson of the SADC Senior Officials - Dr Zainab A.S Chaula – PS,
Ministry of HCDGEC of the United of Tanzania
- Hon Ambassador of the Peoples Republic of China in Tanzania, and
your Officials from the Embassy
- Heads of Missions
- Government Officials
- All Protocol Observed
- Ladies And Gentlemen

On behalf of the Government of the United Republic of Tanzania and indeed on my own behalf I wish to welcome you in Dar es Salaam for this important Extra-Ordinary Meeting of Ministers of Health in the SADC region that will specifically be addressing the Corona Virus Disease.

Allow me to take this opportunity to commend the SADC Secretariat and the World Health Organization for Organizing this Meeting. Indeed, the United Republic of Tanzania as Chair of the SADC Member States appreciates the urgency of this meeting which addresses this new and complicated challenge of Corona Virus Disease.

Honorable Ministers,

Today as Ministers of Health we are meeting here to discuss and agree on the setting up a clear Strategic Plan for Responding to the Coronavirus virus disease. As we all know, the WHO AFRO region has advised that we all should now be operating in the "Response" mode, due to the realities on the ground.

We need to be ready and respond collectively in ensuring that we contain the virus if it enters any of our countries, or delaying its spread together and hence mitigating the impact.

Honorable Ministers,

We should not underestimate the problems already associated with COVID-19. From the time the World Health Organization declared the Corona Virus Disease – 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic as "a Public Health Emergency of International Concern

(PHEIC)", we all are worried about the global spread of this new virus. Today more than 100 countries have confirmed cases of corona.

Keeping this region safe is our collective priority. Meeting here is already a sign of commitment towards harmonizing our approaches based on Technical guidance from the WHO, Africa CDC, and other expert Organizations in both enhanced preparations and response for any eventuality. As we all know, this is a new virus for which we currently have no immunity and for which there is currently no specific treatment or vaccine. That means COVID-19 has the potential to spread extensively in our region.

I am fully aware that all the Member States have heightened their surveillance to quickly diagnose potential new cases of the virus linked to this outbreak. Indeed it has now become apparent that most of the new cases are now being detected through entry screening. The risk of importation of the virus may be reduced if temperature screening at entry points can lead to early detection of symptomatic passengers and their referral for medical follow-up.

Honorable Ministers,

We all by now know that based on currently available information, WHO does not recommend any specific restrictions for travel or trade. However, this may change as the situation evolves. The United Republic of Tanzania like most of our Members States has heightened border screening, prepared a good number of healthcare workers to fight the threat and any imported case, procured some essential supplies including PPEs, enhanced community surveillance and has set up mechanisms for contact tracing and traveller follow up. We have also identified and set up treatment facilities, as well as expanded mass public awareness and education about COVID-19.

However, it is our duty to ensure all interventions are effectively executed and that we should provide travellers in or from affected areas with information to reduce the general risk of acute respiratory infection, by:

- avoiding close contact with people suffering from acute respiratory infections and with live or dead farm or wild animals;
- frequent hand-washing, especially after direct contact with ill people or their environment;
- covering the nose and mouth when coughing, sneezing into a tissue or flexed elbow and contacting their doctors or national health authorities in case of symptoms of acute respiratory infection.

I also urge Public health authorities in the region to intensify collaboration with Airline operators for identification and case management on board aircrafts, should that occur, and appropriate reporting.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have no doubt therefore, that this meeting provides the necessary platform for developing a regional approach to address the establishment of a Multisectoral Regional Cross-border Initiative that will coordinate all the 16 Member States in key mechanisms such as Early Warning and Response System, Health Security and effective Communicators' network. These will support cooperation, rapid exchange of information, swift monitoring and coordination of preparedness and response measures to COVID-19 and any other Disease that may pose a threat to the Region.

Honourable Ministers,

As I conclude my Remarks, I wish to encourage that we all share to our common platform for harmonizing our approaches towards Preparedness and Response to Zoonotic Diseases outbreak in our region. We have an obligation to ensure that a Mutisectoral Approach in Health Care is promoted in the SADC Region, and that we engage in concerted efforts which are scientifically sound and ethically appropriate and in accordance with International Health Regulations.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I take this opportunity to once again thank you and welcome you all to our Commercial City of Dar es Salaam and I look forward to a collective outcome of this meeting that will enhance the cooperation in responding to threats of COVID-19 in our member states and to effectively approach Corona Virus Disease by taking on board the four known elements:

- Contain - detecting early cases, following up close contacts and preventing the disease from taking hold for as long as possible
- Delay – slow the spread of the disease, if it does take hold, so we can lower the peak impact enabling our Health Systems to better cope with the impact.
- Appropriate Research – to better understand the virus and the actions needed to lessen its effect
- Mitigate – providing the best possible care for those who are ill, maintaining essential healthcare and other services and taking steps to minimise where we can the overall impact on society, public services and the community.

It is now my singular honor and privilege to officially declare that the Extraordinary meeting of Ministers of Health in the SADC region on corona virus disease is now officially opened.

Asante Sana,
I Thank you very much,
Muito obrigado,
Merci beaucoup.