



the premier

Office of the Premier  
FREE STATE PROVINCE

## **EXCO MEETS PARENTS OF FREE STATE STUDENTS CURRENTLY IN CHINA**

**20 February 2020**

The Premier of the Free State, Sisi Ntombela and Members of the Executive Council (EXCO), met the parents of the Free State students currently studying in the People's Republic of China, on 19 February, 2020, in Bloemfontein, amidst fears of the well-being of the students due to the recent outbreak of the Novel Coronavirus infection, which has developed into a health emergency of international concern.

The meeting, convened by the Premier to brief and allay fears of the parents of Free State students in China, was also attended by Faith-Based organisations, Executive Mayors and Mayors, delegated, specialized officials of the National Departments of Health and International Relations respectively, the National Institute of Communicable Diseases, and the Chinese Counsel General, Mr. Tang Zongdong, who are currently responsible in ensuring that the epidemic is effectively mitigated.

Mr Zongdong confirmed that the Chinese government was doing everything possible to contain the virus, including extending the quarantine (lockdown) to several cities in China, and screening everyone leaving the republic. He also noted the steps taken to support the students, including providing them with free meals and face masks, and providing online tuition, so that students do not lose out on academic time, and appointing liaison officers in each affected university to assist students with queries and arranging their trips to supermarkets.

The FSPG, after a thorough briefing from the Chinese Counsel General and delegated officials from the aforementioned national departments and institution, can confirm that rumours that a facility in the Free State was to be considered as a place to quarantine people repatriated from China, are indeed false.

Since the beginning of the outbreak, the FSPG, through the necessary authorities at the aforementioned national departments, and directly through the South African Embassy in China, has been in contact with the Free State students currently in China, to ensure their safety and well-being.

However, since the World Health Organisation (WHO) has declared the disease a Global Emergency, the FSPG has had to comply with the stipulations and protocols set out by our national Ministry of Health as directed by the WHO. This declaration accordingly put into effect an internationally and nationally coordinated response to the disease and the spread thereof.

Consequently, The Free State students in China are taken care of by adequate Chinese facilities and personnel where there is such a need.

Both the Chinese and South African Embassies continue to monitor the situation closely, while the National Ministry of Health, in line with protocols of WHO, established a dedicated centre supported by medical scientists through the National Institute of Communicable Diseases.

In addition, certain hospitals in various provinces have been equipped and put in a state of readiness to deal with any eventuality, concerning the virus. In the Free State, Pelonomi Hospital, in the Capital City of Bloemfontein, has been identified as such.

The city of Wuhan, in Hubei Province, China, has been identified as the epicentre of the virus since the first cases of the outbreak were reported late in December 2019. The FSPG currently has students placed there, in various disciplines of study, at numerous institutions of higher learning.

The whole city of Wuhan, where the disease was first reported, is under quarantine where the Free State has 38 registered students at Hubei University and 61 registered at Wuhan University. At Hubei University, only 34 remain, and at Wuhan University only 22 remain, while the rest have since returned to South Africa prior to the outbreak, for internships and holidays.

The Free State students in Wuhan, while not directly infected, are also affected by the imposed quarantine regulations which restrict movement of people in an attempt to limit the spread of the disease. Insofar as the Free State students are concerned, their movement is restricted to the university residences, where they have been living all along, and receive drinking water, milk, bread, and fruits once a week for free.

The students have not been transferred to other areas or localities. The reported difficulties they have endured, are obtaining some essential supplies such as additional face masks, and other supplies for their basic personal needs.

As per regular communication with the Free State students in the affected areas, through the necessary protocols and channels, the FSPG has increased their stipend by 50% during the prevalent health crisis, so that they can acquire additional basic supplies they require. This will apply to all students currently still in China.

The FSPG wishes to allay the fears of the general public, especially the parents of the students in China, and affirm that the situation is receiving the necessary attention of the Premier, the Director-General Kopung Ralikontsane, who remain abundantly abreast of all issues, the Provincial Department of Health and relevant senior government officials and advisors.

In total, the FSPG has 142 registered students in China, studying at various universities. However, only 91 students are currently quarantined in China, while the deficit of 51 has since returned to South African shores, for either internships or holidays, prior to the Coronavirus outbreak.

The full breakdown of the Free State students still in China, per institution of higher learning, is as follows:

- Beijing Institution of Technology (5)
- Dalian Medical University (5)
- Dalian University of Technology (3)
- Hubei University of Technology (38)
- Nanchang University (1)
- Nanjing Agricultural University (9)
- Nanjang University of Science and Technology (1)
- Northwest Polytechnic University (2)
- Wuhan University (22)
- Wuyishan University (2)
- Xi'an Jiantong University (3)

The Premier maintains that government has attached great importance and urgency towards ensuring that all Free State students still in China, return to South Africa, and ultimately their homes, unharmed.

The FSPG remains committed to ensuring that not only the students in China, but the multitudes which remain in other countries, are well taken care of, and ultimately, complete their studies to return to contribute towards the economy of the country and province.

To this end, over and above the 142 students sent to China, the FSPG has sent to international shores, in excess of 1000 students, to countries such as Belarus (44), Bulgaria (16), Cuba (180), Germany (15), India (23), Portugal (195), Russia (295), and Turkey (115).

This investment abroad emphasizes the FSPG's passion for education and the desire to leave a lasting legacy that will increase the number of appropriately skilled citizens that will, in the future, meet the demands of the province and the country in general.

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