

**OPENING REMARKS BY FREE STATE PREMIER SEFORA NTOMBELA
DURING THE VISIT TO THE FREE STATE BY THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, MR DAVID MABUZA, TO
ASSESS RESPONSE PLAN ON COVID-19,**

5 JUNE 2020

**The Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, Honourable
Deputy President David Mabuza;**

Honourable Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. Joe Phaahla;

Members of the Executive Council;

Executive Mayors;

All our partners in the fight against COVID-19;

Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Deputy President, we welcome you and your team to the Free State – the heart of Freedom, the birthplace of Democracy. Your presence here, assures us of your unwavering support to our fight against the Coronavirus pandemic.

Our Provincial approach, which is aimed at enabling rapid response systems to mitigate the severity of the impact of the disease and also to coordinate the province's response to the pandemic, is premised on the following:

Governance Plan;

Economic Recovery Plan;

Enforcement and Compliance Measures;

Provision of Water and Sanitation;

Provision of Food and Shelter.

The Province has been hard at work to fight the Coronavirus. We have carried out intensive public health education and awareness programmes throughout the province, and together with leaders of other political parties in the province, we agreed that this is not the time for politicking, but to put our people first.

As we enter level three of the nationwide lockdown, we want to thank the citizens of this province who have complied with the regulations of level 5 and 4. Without our peoples' sacrifices, we would be in a far worse situation than we are now. We are not yet out of the woods hence our call for continuous compliance at all costs.

Currently, we have **314** confirmed cases in the provinces, with **nine confirmed deaths**, and we urge our people to take a responsibility in saving their lives and the lives of their fellow citizens. Together, we can truly beat the Coronavirus.

Most public servants are starting to return to work as of 01 June 2020 as we enter alert level 3. We have instructed our senior management to ensure that the workplace meet the minimum standards of Occupational Health and Safety Act including the gradual phasing-in of staff.

We are aware that the Coronavirus has triggered social stigma against the people infected and the ones who have been in contact with the virus. This stigma is provoked by anxiety, fear and confusion, but unfortunately if it's perpetuated it will undermine the efforts to limit the spread of the disease.

We do not want people to hide the disease and avoid seeking help from the health care facilities, therefore let no one label any person because of the Coronavirus. Those who seek assistance, should continue to contact our Provincial COVID-19 Hotline, operational 24- hours a day, on: 0800 535 554.

With regards to our response to the economic and social relief measures, the province has implemented a pro-poor plan to provide the necessary support to the people that have been hardest hit by this pandemic. This we have done, working with the relevant National Departments.

We have assisted the homeless, the elderly, the orphans and the unemployed. To ensure that no one is left behind, we have established a Provincial Covid-19 Business Relief Task Team so that our small businesses benefit from the announced relief packages for SMME's.

To further prevent human to human transmission in the communities and public spaces, the Taxi Association has been provided with the necessary material and encouraged to adhere to the rules of sanitisation and distancing. 65 Taxi Ranks across the Province, have been disinfected and provided with sanitizers. The people in the informal settlement where water was a challenge were provided with tanks, tankers and hygiene products.

In conclusion Deputy President, we have done fairly well as the province in responding to the pandemic, as you will see in the presentation we are about to deliver to you.

The outbreak of this virus has revealed the true character of this nation – that of unity. As a people, we are stronger together, and have more in common than that which divides us. Let us unite to fight and curb the spread of the Coronavirus.

We could not have gotten this far, had we worked alone. We were fortunate to receive assistance from various sectors and individuals who displayed compassion by helping those affected including the support we receive from the national government. Your presence today is a testimony of our government's continuous support and strengthens our resolve to fight this pandemic.

Equally, the determination from the people of this Province has illustrated that together we can do more.

It is in your hands, in my hands and in our hands to confront this deadly disease and overcome it.

Let us work together to protect and save South Africa.

It is indeed in our hands.

I thank you.