



REMARKS BY THE PREMIER OF THE FREE STATE, SISI NTOMBELA ON THE OCCASION OF THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE COVID-19 HIGH CARE UNIT AT UNIVERSITAS HOSPITAL, BLOEMFONTEIN, ON 13 AUGUST 2020

MEC for Health, Montseng Tsiu,
The Chief Executive Officer of Universitas Hospital and all staff,
Public and Private sector leaders present,
Healthcare professionals here today,
Members of the media,
Ladies and gentlemen,

South Africa as a whole, currently faces a spike in COVID-19 cases, which has compelled



government to intensify efforts to protect our people.

It remains the responsibility of government to be proactive in fighting this global pandemic, and put measures in places to curb the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact on society. The battle is on, and we, as the Free State, are ready to face it.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Provincial Coronavirus Command Council, which I chair, continues to look at various proposals on how best to protect our communities from COVID-19.

As economic activity has gradually opened up, and more outdoor activity has resumed, the risk of infection has also increased. As such, our current hospital structures across the province,



will inevitably take a huge amount of strain in terms of beds and capacity, as a result of the current surge of the virus.

Taking all factors into consideration, our government, since May 2020 in anticipation of this peak, begun plans to roll out what you have seen here today – provision of additional beds for the COVID-19 patients.

Through the excellent work of the Provincial Department of Health, we are today, officially opening the Expanded High Care Unit for COVID-19.

The Universitas Academic Hospital now houses 103 Expanded Bed Space for COVID-19, and 60 High Care Beds at House Idhalia.

These bed spaces, previously utilized for basement car parking - are both here at the



Universitas Academic Hospital. This new ward, which will care for COVID-19 patients, will henceforth be known as the **Tumelo Ward**, which loosely translated, means “Hope”, because we remain hopeful as a province that we shall overcome this pandemic, and that those who enter these premises and facility, will recover to tell the good story of a caring government that continues to protect its people in these very difficult times. These measures will go a long way in relieving the pressure on our healthcare system.

I am proud to also announce that this project will be rolled out other hospitals across the province. Soon, we will officially open a new ward at Pelonomi Hospital, here in Bloemfontein, and Bongani Hospital in Welkom, and it is our wish that we prepare all Districts of our province against this invisible



enemy called COVID-19. We will soon also officially open the doors to a Field Hospital, to be established at the Bloemfontein Showgrounds.

Phase 1 of the Field Hospital will accommodate **nine hundred and thirty six (936)** beds, while upon full completion, we anticipate to have **four thousand, two hundred and fifty two (4252)** beds at the Field Hospital.

In all these endeavors, we have also increased our sisters and nursing personnel, employed support staff, social workers, physiotherapists, radiographers, household aids and clerks, to assist in this fight of our lives.

These measures, are also done with the future in mind. The equipment to be utilized, and health personnel to form part of these



processes, will be retained to strengthen our healthcare system well beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen, it would be amiss of me, to stand here and not wholeheartedly thank those who continue to risk their lives to ensure the safety of others: Our Healthcare Workers and Professionals. I thank the MEC for Health, Montseng Tsiu, for holding a special tribute to our Healthcare Workers and Professionals, two days ago, and also paying homage to those who have succumbed to the virus.

To echo and ratify the MECs words, let me also take this opportunity to unreservedly thank all the healthcare workers and health practitioners in the forefront of fighting this virus. From the cleaners, to administration workers, to staff nurses – all those involved in the value chain



that keeps our health facilities functional. You are doing well as a province.

Lastly, as I conclude, I wish to say that as government intensifies its measures to defeat this dreaded virus, we must at all times continue to make a plea to members of the community at large, to take extra caution during this period, and minimize the risk of infection.

We urge the public to continue to follow basic personal hygiene habits, such as the regular washing of hands, sanitizing and also wearing face cloth masks when in public, and practicing social and physical distancing.



We further call upon all our citizens, young and old, to also take active personal responsibility for their wellbeing and that of those around them, and remain safe during this period. ***Kena Le Tumelo*** - Indeed, I am hopeful, that we shall overcome this pandemic.

Without a shadow of doubt, and without tiring, we shall, even during these trying times, continue to build the Free State We Want!

Together we can do more to fight COVID-19.

Thank You, Ke a Leboha.

