



MEDIA STATEMENT

EXTRA-ORDINARY MEETING OF SADC MINISTERS OF HEALTH ON COVID-19

SADC Ministers of Health met today, 9th March 2020, at Julius Nyerere International Convention Centre, Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, under the Chairpersonship of Honourable Ummu Mwalimu, Minister of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children for the United Republic of Tanzania, and Chair of the SADC Sectoral Committee of Ministers of Health. The meeting was attended by Angola, DRC, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The main purpose of the meeting was to share existing knowledge and information on the COVID-19 outbreak, which has had devastating global impacts since its outbreak in December 2019, and agree on how to harmonize and coordinate the preparedness and response to Covid-19 in the SADC region.

The meeting noted that COVID-19 has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization on 30 January 2020, with potential significant impacts. The meeting also received presentation and noted the COVID-19 global situation and measures taken at global level as presented by WHO, and the Government of the People's Republic of China.

The meeting also noted the status on the level of preparedness of the Member States in addressing COVID-19, and urged Member States to put in place National Preparedness and Response Plans as well as contingency and emergency funds to address gaps in prevention, impact mitigation and other interventions.

The meeting also urged Member States to institute Peer Review Mechanisms to validate self-assessment reports on readiness, and requested international cooperating partners, through the WHO and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), to support Member States in the development and implementation of country plans, as well as in resource mobilization for health-related infrastructure development.

The meeting agreed that Member States will establish coherent mechanisms of sharing information on issues of transboundary public health concern, and that the Technical Committee for Coordinating and Monitoring the Implementation of the SADC Protocol on Health comprising of Directors of Public Health and Directors of Medical Services be re-established, and its terms of reference be expanded.

The meeting directed the revived Committee to work in partnership with Disaster Management and other relevant structures at Member State and regional levels, and other sectors in government (Immigration, Tourism, Finance, Foreign Affairs and Trade); Africa CDC; Development Partners; Private Sector; and Civil society in line with the expanded Terms of Reference.

The meeting recommended a temporary suspension of SADC regional face-to-face meetings and encourage utilization of Modern Technology such as video-conferences, Webinars and Skype Calls for holding such meetings until such a time when the situation has been contained. The temporary suspension to be monitored by the Chairperson of Council, supported by the SADC Secretariat.

The meeting agreed that SADC Member States, in collaboration with WHO and Africa CDC, will continuously provide training and support to enhance readiness and preparedness of SADC Member States.

The meeting urged Member States to encourage preventive measures such as handwashing and sanitization of surfaces, in workplaces and domestic settings.

The meeting also urged SADC Member States to utilize the SADC Pooled Procurement Services through Medical Stores Department (MSD) for the procurement of medicines and supplies.

The meeting urged SADC Member States to mobilise domestic resources, and invest in public health systems to ensure resilience and health security.

The meeting further urged Member States to align country plans to continental strategies and utilize the existing technical structures such as the Africa CDC Regional Coordinating Team (RCT) in Zambia and WHO.

The meeting commended China, WHO and Africa CDC for the efforts being made towards addressing the COVID-19, and pledged SADC's continued solidarity towards China and other countries affected by the virus.

The People's Republic of China extended gratitude to SADC Member States and the SADC Secretariat for standing in solidarity with China during this difficult time, and assured the meeting that all SADC citizens, including students, are being taken care of in terms of prevention and monitoring, and no one has been infected.

The meeting also commended the United Republic of Tanzania for organizing and hosting the Extraordinary Meeting in a timely manner, and Member States for measures taken at national level, and for attending the meeting.

Done in Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, 9th day of March 2020