

Statement on Random Testing

COVID -19 continues to spread at an alarming rate globally since the first outbreak of the disease in December last year. To-date, the pandemic has engulfed more than 200 countries and territories infecting more than 4.6 million people and claiming more than 300,000 lives.

In the majority of countries, controlling the contagion and leveling the curve still remain elusive objectives and aspirations. Reversing the rate of transmission and eschewing the risk of resurgence have not, indeed, crystallized yet.

At the same time, the multiple and intensive researches earnestly underway to find vaccines or therapeutic drugs for COVID-19 are still at an early, preliminary phase. All these factors accentuate the magnitude and gravity of the global pandemic.

Against this preoccupying backdrop, the GOE's strategy of combating COVID-19 has been clear and unequivocal from the outset.

The essence of this policy consists of taking, first and foremost, all requisite measures to prevent an outbreak of the disease and to curtail its transmission through robust Non-Pharmaceutical Measures in the event of its occurrence in the country. This strategy of suppression is predicated on the overarching concept of "blocking the transmission chain of COVID-19" rather than merely focusing on mitigation measures of provision of medical treatment to infected patients.

In this respect, the GOE has implemented, prior to and after the onset of the disease, a raft of preventive measures with increasing intensity in response to the situation on the ground. These measures include the "stay at home" policy that is still in force. The conscientious role of the Eritrean people has been and remains a critical element in the success of this endeavour.

One of the central features of the strategy of prevention consists of putting in quarantine all persons who entered the country through air, sea and land routes. This was implemented from the outset. The strategy also incorporates active tracing and quarantining of immediate contacts of those diagnosed positive for COVID-19. In this respect, 3,486 persons have been quarantined to-date in 70 centers established throughout the country. Over 2,400 were released subsequently after due processes while over 1,000 individuals still remain in quarantine in 33 centers.

In tandem with these measures, necessary medical treatment was given to those diagnosed positive for COVID-19 in appropriate facilities set up for the purpose. The total number of infected individuals to-date is

39. All of them have recovered fully and the last patient was released from hospital yesterday.

Inspiring as it is, this milestone is not a cause for complacency. Indeed, there are critical questions that must be addressed. We cannot state, at this stage, that the spread of COVID-19 has been curtailed fully in view of the nature and gravity of the disease, the prevailing global and regional realities and trends, as well as the substantial proportion of asymptomatic cases that may exist at any point in time.

In the event, the GOE has decided for the launching of random and extensive testing to gauge the spread of COVID-19 in the country in a comprehensive and more reliable manner. This endeavour is essential for the full appraisal that will be inferred from detailed and extensive data.

In this respect, the first phase of tests will be carried out in several sections of Asmara from Sunday, 17th May onwards. Towns and villages in border areas, as well as front-line employees in the Ministry of Health and other relevant institutions will also be part and parcel of this first phase testing. Modalities for subsequent phases of testing will be determined by the outcome of the first phase as well as relevant global and regional realities and trends.

In conclusion, the High Level Task Force urges all citizens to maintain the commendable role that they have played so far in the full implementation of the Guidelines, and, to rectify few breaches that have occurred intermittently until the completion of the tests for a solid appraisal of the situation with full certainty.

High Level Task Force for COVID-19
Asmara
16 May 2020