



— FROM THE DESK OF —  
**THE PRESIDENT**

• Monday, 23 March 2020 •

Dear Fellow South African,

There comes a time in the affairs of a country when, in the face of the most formidable of challenges, its very existence as a nation is put to the test.

The coronavirus pandemic continues to spread at a relentless pace across the globe. As nations of the world we find ourselves in the same fight: to contain the virus, to protect the lives of our people, and to fortify our economies against the inevitable disruption to manufacturing, productivity, growth and employment.

It has been a week since we declared a National State of Disaster as an urgent response to the outbreak and put in place necessary containment measures.

These measures relate to the prohibition of gatherings of more than 100 people, restrictions on people entering the country, the closure of schools, the sale of alcohol and emergency procurement procedures in support of the fight against COVID-19.

The Department of Health, supported by the entire government communications machinery, has led efforts to raise awareness among the general public around screening and detection, prevention, hygiene control and the importance of social distancing.

The manner in which all South Africans have taken charge of not just their own personal health but the health of those around them has been exemplary and heartening. Everywhere we see signs of behavioural change as the nation rallies behind infection control measures.

From filling stations to taxi ranks, from spazas to restaurants, South Africans fully understand the gravity

of the situation. Hand-washing is being practiced and hand sanitiser is available in stores and other retail spaces. People are observing the rules restricting large public gatherings. Businesses and workplaces are complying with the regulations in the best interests of their customers and employees.

Last week representatives from all the political parties in Parliament stood united on a public platform to declare their support for the national effort to combat the pandemic. At the same time, they offered practical and workable suggestions on how we can mitigate its impact on lives and livelihoods.

In the same week, religious leaders representing a multiplicity of faiths and denominations also affirmed their support, taking bold and far-reaching decisions to contain the spread of the virus in churches, temples, mosques and synagogues. They did so fully understanding that no matter how sensitive and difficult these decisions are, the sanctity of life must be preserved.

Corporate South Africa and the business community have stepped up, affirming their support for the emergency measures and regulations, and opening channels of engagement around the economic impact of COVID-19. Yesterday, I met with representatives of the business community to discuss measures we need to take together to combat the pandemic and address its economic impact.

Elsewhere, large retailers have issued directives restricting the purchase quantities of in-demand items to curtail so-called 'panic buying'. This measure was a laudable effort to protect the rights of ordinary South Africans, but most especially the poor. It is also a welcome sign that South African business will not engage in unscrupulous profiteering from a national disaster.

This week I will be meeting with different arms of the state, trade unions, traditional leaders, civil society formations and other sectors. I have no doubt that they too are already mobilised and united behind the national effort.

What we are witnessing is social solidarity in action, a defining feature of our nationhood. At times of crisis such as this one, it would be easy to surrender to the impulses of opportunism, greed and naked self-interest. History bears witness to the dark side of human nature that can be exposed when fear and panic takes hold.

But as the South African nation we are standing firm. As we navigate our way through the difficult times that lie ahead, we must continue in the spirit of empathy and selflessness and move with unity of purpose. The social compacts of which I have spoken are needed now as never before. Of these, the social compact between citizens and their government is the most important of all.

I am a firm believer in the people. I also believe, as Abraham Lincoln once said, that "if given the truth, [the people] can be depended upon to meet any national crisis".

We know the truth and what is to be done. We have to contain the spread of the virus. We have to ensure those who need help get it. We have to observe the highest standards of hygiene and practice social distancing.

Our success relies on the effort and energies of every citizen and their commitment to help and assist others.

This crisis will not debilitate our nation. In how we have responded, we have affirmed the true character of our nationhood. It is strong, it is resilient and, above all, it is rooted in solidarity.

It is these attributes of our national character that won us our democracy and it is what will ensure our victory over this pandemic.

With best wishes,

Cyril Ramaphosa



THE PRESIDENCY  
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