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دولة إرتريا
وزارة الشؤون الخارجية

The State of Eritrea
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Intervention by
Ms. Elsa Haile, Director, International Organization Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of the State of Eritrea at the meeting of National Focal Point of LDCs
in Africa
On Response to COVID-19 and Way Forward
Asmara, 11 June 2020

Madame Chair
Dear Colleagues,

I would like to start by thanking Ambassador Perks Master Clemency, Chair of Group of the Least Developed Countries. Eritrea commends your leadership. Our thanks also go to Ms. Fekitamoeloa Utoikamanu the Under Secretary- General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDC, and SIDS and her team for convening this important meeting.

It is my honour to share with you Eritrea's experience and lessons learned in containing COVID-19 and mitigating its socio-economic effects.

The first case of COVID-19 in Eritrea was registered on 21 March 2020. Eritrea has to date recorded a total of 41 cases and zero deaths; 39 individuals have fully recovered and 2 cases are still active. Since the emergence of this global pandemic, Eritrea pursued a two-pronged strategy: containing this deadly disease and continuing with the major national development projects.

In relation to COVID-19, early mitigation measures and intensive public awareness campaigns have been important in containing the spread of COVID 19 and reducing its effects. The GoE began thermal screening at all ports of entry in late January in order to detect and isolate cases and for contact tracing. Once the first case of the virus was recorded in late March, the government took swift action to close borders, ban intercity travel and travel by air to and from the country. Eritrea, introduced "Stay-at-Home" measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Through close cooperation with the private sector we have boosted prevention; local manufacturing industries were retooled to produce disinfectants.

Any measure would not have been successful without the full contribution and cooperation of the citizens. Despite all the severe disruptions and challenges it created, Eritreans all over the country appreciated the importance of the measures taken and have fully respected the guidelines. Societal contribution in Eritrea went beyond respecting the measures; the Eritrean society has shown exemplary commitment, solidarity, and burden sharing. People continue to make financial and material contributions, one example being the cancellation of rent payments until the restrictive measures are lifted.

Media in Eritrea has played a decisive role in helping with the dissemination of valuable information to help build awareness amongst the population. Singers, actors, comedians, the artist community in general, all have come together to communicate critical and key messages with humor, song and acting; and this has been well received by the public.

The technical and financial contributions of the Eritrean diaspora as well from nationals living in Eritrea cannot go unmentioned. Aware of the impacts that COVID-19 will have on the country, Eritreans all around the world have continuously raised funds for the efforts to fight the battle against the COVID-19 pandemic. In the past two months Eritreans abroad have raised millions of dollars for the national fight against the pandemic. Our diaspora communities continue to support each other and share the burdens and pains. The same is true for all segments of the population inside the country.

We are acutely aware of the economic set back the pandemic might create, the GoE is keen on ensuring that this pandemic does not overwhelm or paralyze us and disrupt the development programmes that the country has embarked on. Within the appropriate social distancing and sanitation requirements, it has exempted vital sectors including manufacturing, agricultural, mining, construction of major roads and dams.

Madame Chair
Dear Colleagues,

While we recognize the success so far achieved, we cannot be complacent. In order to be able to continue to control the spread of the virus, the High-Level Task Force on COVID-19 announced in mid-May that the GoE will conduct random and widespread testing across the country in different phases to estimate the spread of COVID-19. The first phases of these tests were finalized on 2 June in the capital of Asmara.

Although flights to and from Eritrea have been stopped since the outbreak of COVID-19, travel to the country through land continue to grow at this point in time. As a result, 5270 individuals were put in quarantine in 81 centres established throughout the country during these past months; 3477 of these were released subsequently after due processes while 1793 individuals still remain in quarantine in 45 centres. It is evident that this influx will continue even as necessary border control measures are taken.

Madame Chair,
Dear Colleagues,

The most important lessons from this unprecedented global pandemic crisis, are the following:

1. The importance of enhanced prevention and mitigation strategy - upgrading human, institutional, financial, technological capacity, including capacities of manufacturing drugs and medical equipment;
2. Active community awareness and involvement. Collaborative community role is indeed critical for successful implementation of restrictive measure proposed
3. Importance of working to deliver accurate and timely information about the health crises to the public, including proactively dealing with misinformation and existing societal prejudices.
4. Harnessing the financial and social remittance of the diaspora.

Madame Chair,

As the effects of COVID-19 continue to unfold, it is clear that this pandemic will have long term impacts on our countries and our continent. While LDCs in the aftermath of this pandemic will need the solidarity and international support, it is most important that we continue to engage with each other and share lessons learned in order for us to regain and advance our development objectives.

I would like to express a heartfelt appreciation to Eritrean health workers, the Police, artists and all essential workers that are putting their lives and the lives of their loved ones to keep us safe

I would also like to take this opportunity to express Eritrea's solidarity with all the countries that are fighting this pandemic and extend our condolences for the loss of human lives.

I thank you.