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I am, You are, We are Together in ending COVID-19

CAMPAIGN

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MEDIA RELEASE: Flattening the curve requires all hands on deck

Forty days and counting since the national lockdown took effect on March 27, the Community Constituency Covid-19 Front (the Covid-19 Front) remains committed to supporting the government’s response plans in fighting against the novel Corona Virus. While the National Department of Health announced its intention in early April to test at least 30,000 people per day and although the number of screenings may have increased, we are deeply concerned that the target is far from being reached. South Africa cannot afford any delays in efforts to flatten the curve.

Of course the Covid-19 Front acknowledges that the pandemic is unprecedented thus South Africa is not alone in missing its daily testing targets; the UK missed its daily targets four days in a row in the first week of May. Although we are not surprised that the national daily target for testing is being missed, it remains a fact that until a vaccine is found – South Africa’s only hope against the COVID-19 is testing as many people in as a short period as possible.

The Head of Contact Tracing and Testing Dr Matome Kganakga says, “so far the Covid-19 Front is pleased with two things from government – one, the number of screenings seem to be increasing at an acceptable rate. Two, provincial departments are making the right announcements with regards to testing – for instance, Gauteng health’s intention to test 5 million people by the end of June. 5 million may only be a third of the province’s population but the announcement of a target date assures us that there is commitment to drastically ramp up testing. We hope to see all the other provinces making commitments that we can track and hold them accountable against.”

“As the religious leaders, we will continue to use our networks and influence on the ground to deal with issues such as stigma which may retard the contact tracing and testing efforts. Even as religious leaders, we understand that in order to successfully flatten the curve – testing is critical therefore we have a bigger responsibility to come together and spread the message against stigma and, to contribute towards attaining the national daily target of testing” says Bishop Sakhele Makhubu, a representative of the Faith Based Organisations in the Community Constituency Covid-19 Front.

The Covid-19 Front calls on the private sector to help government in creating the adequate capacity to not only ramp up testing but also to provide equitable healthcare access including for all sick and vulnerable citizens and, to reduce the cost testing in the private laboratories. Affordability should never

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be the means to exclude or prohibit citizens from accessing healthcare services. It is important that acute medication is available free of charge to patients that are not members of a medical aid. With the risk-adjusted reopening of the economy allowing for more activity, we want to see pharmacies ensuring that chronic medication is available to as many patients as possible, and where possible, dispensing it through smart delivery mechanisms.

The Covid-19 Front is quite pleased to see many people in particular the townships, taking up the opportunity to produce all sorts of cloth masks in response to the amended National Disaster regulations that require every person to wear a mask when in public. While this is good, we want to see cooperatives incorporated into the supply chains and production of PPE including masks, face shields and all the other necessary gear and sanitizers.

As Civil Society we remain concerned about the recent report by the National Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize that to date, more than 500 health workers tested positive with some 26 of them hospitalised and 2 fatalities. The healthcare workers have been and continue to be on the frontline in this war against the pandemic therefore such reports can only contribute to their collective anxiety especially with the well-known shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) even in health facilities. The Covid-19 Front reiterates its call for all healthcare workers both in the public and private sectors to be respected and supported with the necessary and adequate PPE. Their protection is non-negotiable.

Dr Kganakga adds, “the community health workers are critical frontline delivery workers that augment the capacity of contact tracing and testing. They must receive the appropriate support and be respected as essential workers and, also be provided with the necessary information and education. As part of the healthcare workforce, they must also be provided with adequate protective gear and the screening kits. In our view, the adequate support to community healthcare workers will expedite the screening and testing which in turn will help flatten the curve sooner.”

The Covid-19 Front will continue advocate for the right to health and most importantly, we will fight for all rights including the right of choice to traditional, allied, complementary and alternative health services. We will continue to support the producers and informal traders of traditional medicine.

“While many people are awaiting the R350-00 payment from the social relief programme of government, we know that food parcels will continue to be delivered. We condemn the reported corruption with the food parcels as they take away from people who are in desperate of need nutritious meals. Undoubtedly, nutrition is important in building stronger immune systems therefore access to food by all citizens is essential. As Civil Society, we have the necessary networks and mechanisms in communities

to help support government and the private sector with the delivery of food packages.” Concludes Dr Kganakga.

About the Community Constituency Covid-19 Front

The Community Constituency Covid-19 Front was established as a formal advisory body to facilitate the participation of civil society sectors and networks, including those represented in the national response and implementations of Community-Based Measures in response to the novel Coronavirus (Covid-19). The Community Constituency Covid-19 Front promotes an inclusive, competent and responsive civil society that effectively serves the needs of communities by linking and diversifying civil society actors, expanding the sector's response and ensuring better coordination, thus improving operations, and enhancing connections between civil society organisations with government, business labour, their stakeholders and beneficiaries.

The Covid-19 Front aims to provide a hub of information and contacts for distribution and engagement through our members across the country.

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