

PRESS STATEMENT

FAITH LEADERS' PLATFORM ON COVID 19 RESPONSE IN MALAWI

TACKLING COVID 19 TOGETHER: THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

INTRODUCTION

Malawi recorded the first three cases of COVID-19 on 2nd April, 2020. Twelve days later the number rose to 19 representing an increase of more than 500 %. Malawi now is one of the high risk countries to COVID-19 as cases are increasing speedily. The increase has been exacerbated by the influx of repatriated Malawians from South Africa and other neighbouring countries.

In a bid to exercise safety from the infection, the faith community has had to face the need to review some religious practices and in extreme cases, religious gathering have been suspended. In order to utilise religion's social capital, religious groups in Malawi created a Faith Leaders' Platform on COVID 19 Response.

The Platform has 15 members which include 7 members of the Malawi Interfaith AIDS Association (Evangelical Association of Malawi, Malawi Council of Churches, Muslim Association of Malawi, Qadria Muslim Association of Malawi, Seventh Day Adventist, Episcopal Conference of Malawi, and Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches Network of Malawi); 7 ACT Alliance Malawi Forum members (Norwegian Church Aid, Dan Church Aid, Christian Aid, World Renew, Salvation Army, Churches Action in Relief and Development and Evangelical Lutheran Development Service); and The Prophetic Ministries Association of Malawi.

The Faith Leaders' Platform on COVID 19 Response in Malawi is steered by ACT alliance Malawi Forum, Malawi Interfaith AIDS Association (MIAA) and Evangelical Association of Malawi (EAM).

COMMENDATIONS

The Faith Leaders' Platform on COVID-19 Response wishes to commend the government and other players in the COVID-19 response for the following steps taken so far:

- a. Opening of COVID-19 testing centres in all the regions of the country.
- b. Provision of regular information on COVID-19 by Ministry of Health, including updates on COVID-19 cases in Malawi.
- c. Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment for frontline healthcare workers.
- d. Provision of risk allowance to health workers.
- e. Repatriation of Malawian citizens from South Africa back to Malawi
- f. The planned provision of social safety nets to vulnerable families
- g. Availing of loans to youths and women
- h. Solicitation of funding commitments towards COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan

OBSERVATIONS

As the monitoring of number of COVID-19 cases continues, the platform has noted the following gaps in the way the response is being managed.

a. **Open defiance of preventive measures by politicians**

The Faith Leaders Platform on COVID 19 Response in Malawi notes that politicians in Malawi have ignored COVID 19 measures for mass political rallies. Additionally, the Platform has noted that continued holding of political rallies without following COVID 19 measures is countering the good messages and measures being propagated by MoH.

b. **Imported Cases**

While the international borders remain closed except for essential goods and services, the platform notes with concern that Malawi continues to register imported cases.

c. **Repatriation of Malawian citizens from South Africa.**

While repatriation of Malawians from South Africa due to the difficult economic conditions associated with the lockdown in South Africa is appreciated, the platform notes with concern that adherence and enforcement of quarantine guidelines at entry points and in country remain a challenge.

d. **COVID-19 Testing Centres**

While thanking the government for establishing 13 testing centres, the platform observes that the current number is inadequate for a population of not less than 18 million in Malawi.

e. **Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment for frontline healthcare workers**

While the government and other stakeholders have demonstrated commitment by procuring PPE, the platform notes that the supply is inadequate.

f. **Provision of risk allowance to healthcare workers**

While the provision of the risk allowance is a welcome move to incentivize health workers, however the platform has noted the concern raised by healthcare workers that the tax should be removed, as significant.

g. **The planned provision of social safety nets to vulnerable families**

While the planned provision of social safety nets is a welcome initiative, the platform notes with concern that it lacks the necessary transparency to inspire confidence.

h. **Transparency of COVID-19 Emergency Response**

While government has created a funding basket for the COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan, the platform noted with concern that its management lacks transparency and inclusiveness.

i. **Non-compliance by some religious groups to COVID-19 guidelines**

The platform notes that some religious groups are not fully complying with the set precautionary measures of COVID-19.

OUR APPEAL

Open defiance of preventive measures by politicians

The platform calls on leaders of political parties (both government and opposition side) to lead by example by taking personal responsibility and accountability in the prevention of COVID-19. The Platform is calling for immediate review of political gatherings to embrace COVID 19 precautionary measures: Let public compliance with precaution measures, including social distancing, Wearing of

face masks, hand washing, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers and restricting gatherings to a maximum number of 100 participants be followed accordingly. The time to act is now!

Imported Cases

The platform calls on the COVID-19 Task Force through the department of Immigration to suspend the entry of foreign nationals to avoid imported cases. The Platform appeals with government to quickly make sure that all points of entry are tightly controlled. Imported cases can be avoided. The time to act is now!

Repatriation of Malawian citizens from South Africa

- a. The platform calls on the COVID-19 Task Force, the Police, and Immigration Department to ensure that no quarantine is undertaken without the provision of a social safety net. The Platform further calls on government to step up testing of repatriates and take proactive quarantine considerations in accordance with Article 32 of the International Health Regulations.
- b. The Platform calls on the returnees to be responsible citizens and ensure that they comply with the COVID-19 quarantine instructions.

The time to act is now!

COVID-19 Testing Centres

With concerns of under-reporting on COVID-19 statistics in many countries, the platform calls on the Ministry of Health to increase the number of testing centres in the country and improve the capacity to test on-site and in real-time. The time to act is now!

Procurement of Personal Protective Equipment for frontline healthcare workers

The Platform calls on MoH, the COVID-19 Task Force, MoF and other stakeholders to ensure adequate and sustainable supply with equitable distribution of PPEs to healthcare workers. Further, the platform wishes to call on all citizens and residents of Malawi to spare surgical masks for frontline healthcare workers. The time to act is now!

Provision of risk allowance to healthcare workers

The platform notes concerns raised by healthcare workers on the tax that is being levied on the allowances to be removed. The platform calls on the MoH and MoF, as well as the National Organization of Nurses and Midwives of Malawi (NONM) to prioritize the issue so that it does not lead to another sit-in. The time to act is now!

The planned provision of social safety nets to vulnerable families

The platform calls on those responsible for management and disbursement of social safety nets such as Mtukula Pakhomo to be more inclusive, apolitical and transparent in the process of identification and registration of beneficiaries. The time to act is now!

Transparency and Accountability of COVID-19 Emergency Response Funds

While appreciating the goodwill of donors and other development partners in the COVID-19 Response Plan by providing critical financial resources, the platform calls on government and all stakeholders, and the COVID-19 Task Force in particular to be more transparent, inclusive, and accountable in the use of COVID-19 funds. Such transparency can be achieved by creating a dashboard for financial expenditure similar to the one for COVID-19 cases. The time to act is now!

Non-compliance by some religious groups to COVID-19 guidelines

The platform is encouraging all religious platforms through their leadership to re-enforce compliance to COVID-19 measures. The Platform calls upon all faith communities in Malawi to follow the set precautionary measures on COVID 19 without ceasing. For both the Bible and Quran agree that we should not be tired of doing good works. It's not yet time to take off masks. The time to act is now!

Signed on behalf of The Faith Leaders' Platform on COVID 19 Response in Malawi:

<p>Rev Dr Gilford Immanuel Matonga Board Chair – Malawi Interfaith AIDS Association</p>	<p>Dickens Mtonga ACT Alliance Malawi Forum Convenor</p>
<p>Signature</p> 	<p>Signature:</p> 
<p>June 10, 2020</p>	<p>June 10, 2020</p>