

**Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma**  
**Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs**  
Speaking Notes for the NCOP Virtual Debate on COVID-19  
***Ensuring Cooperative Governance in Managing the Provincial Spread and  
Socio- economic Implications of the Covid-19 pandemic***  
24 June 2020

Honourable Chair of the National Council of Provinces;

Delegates;

Compatriots;

Ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for this opportunity to address this house and report on progress and challenges we have recorded in our response to COVID-19.

It is now 109 days since the first reported case of COVID-19 on our shores. Although the virus was first discovered in Wuhan China in December 2019, it has spread like a wild fire, causing havoc in all corners of the world. As of last night, there were over 9 million infections, with over 471 thousand deaths, and over 4,8 million recoveries in the world.

Its impact globally has caused untold miseries, with the global economy expected to plummet by at least 3% and global trade has already reduced by 33%. Everywhere in the world job losses are expected and our own African economy is set to shrink by between 5 and 7%.

Even the most advanced economies in the world, have been found wanting when it comes to a response. In general, they have mounted a mix of stimulus packages, in an attempt to mitigate the effects of the virus and jump start there declining economies.

Nothing could have prepared us to deal with this virus, not since the Spanish flu has the world been confronted by a public health challenge of this magnitude.

On our continent, we had registered 306 567 cases, with 8 115 fatalities with 146 212 recoveries, as of yesterday. The alarming pace of infections has seen the infection rate on the continent reach 100 000 cases in just 100 days since the first infection was recorded in Egypt on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, however it took just 18 days to get to 200 000. It has taken the continent 10 days to surpass the 300 000 measure. The infection rates, because of the nature of the virus have been accelerated.

Certainly, this has been the case when it comes to our country. When we last addressed this house, we had 22 583 cases with 429 deaths. Today we have 101,590 confirmed cases with 1 991 fatalities and 53 130 recoveries.

The situation could have been worse had it not been for the swift response of the President and Cabinet, as supported by the various advisory teams including the National, Provincial and District Command Councils, which we briefed this house on during our last engagement. We have had to take tough decisions and South Africans have had to make major sacrifices.

All this was necessary.

Before we placed the country on a National Lockdown the rates of infection grew 100 fold in the first 13 days, reaching 116 cases. During the

Level 5 Lockdown that rate of infection significantly slowed down only growing 6<sup>th</sup> fold over a 35 day period. Indeed, our extraordinary measures paid off as the majority of our people understood and heeded the call to work from home (where they could), wash or sanitize their hands and maintain a safe social distance. The essential service workers also placed their lives on the line to ensure that most of us got the essential goods and services we need.

Sithi Siyabonga Mzansi!!

Indeed, the extraordinary measures they implemented, including the lockdown have paid off. Our health system is better, but still not adequately prepared to deal with the virus.

The virus has placed in our faces the glaring realities of hunger, poverty, inequality and unemployment faced by our people. We can no longer afford to hide from these realities. The perpetuation of apartheid spatial planning has also continued to locate our people far from the places of work and access to essential goods and services. Where they happen to have to access essential services and basic food, the costs are high. With the lockdown Gender Based Violence also increased, this requires a society wide and effective response.

The virus has also exposed our ineffective production methods and choices. We have not sufficiently marshalled our industries to support and back our development ambitions, despite of us aspiring to be a development state. The shortages in relation to medical and health care supplies as well as PPEs, are a good example.

The over reliance on the export market for even the basics such as food has also exposed the gaps in production choices and the structure within our economy. Thankfully, a national consensus has been reached that COVID-19 can be reset button, by which we can chart a better and more inclusive growth path, which has vibrant, resilient and climate smart communities.

As reported in our last presentation to this house our response has had several tenants including those which sort to provide social relief, business support and economic stimulation. We have also looked at utilising our monetary policies, by for instance cutting the Repo rates. On the fiscal end we also put in place employment tax incentives and reprioritised all national and provincial budgets, to support service delivery in basic services which are essential form our fight against COVID-19.

Our fight against COVID-19 has received overwhelming support from various sectors, including the traditional leaders. Through the various councils and leaders, we have been able to communicate with our people, especially the rural masses. They have cooperated with us in halting risky cultural activities such as initiations. To them and their leadership we say thank you, Nangamso!!

**Honourable delegates**, our fight against COVID-19 has not been without challenges. Funerals have been one such major challenge as these necessary events have proven to be venues of high transmission. With the collaboration of religious and traditional leaders as well as communities we are slowly managing to minimise the risk. Another challenge has been interprovincial travel, which has also proven to be a high risk transmission factor. Through various regulations and directions,

we have also minimised this.

Through the various levels, we have carefully listened to the challenges and proposals for various quarters. Where we could minimise the risk, we did, as was the case when it came to the movement of children to their normal places of residence. Where we could minimise risk, we implemented health and hygiene protocols that could be responsive to the challenge at hand.

Ours is in the interest of the health and future of our glorious nation.

**Honourable delegates**, the virus has also challenged the capacity and capability of the state in all its spheres. For instance, at our most recent MINMEC, Gauteng province reported that during the month of May Johannesburg City only collected 33% of their historic and projected collections. This is despite the fact that Johannesburg is historically a better collector and in the previous month it collected 80%. This means old formulas and strategies do not have the capability to carry us through.

We have also been faced 55 COVID related challenges, an unprecedented number in such a short space of time. On the one hand there are the set of litigations who believe we have chosen the wrong legislation or instruments for implementation. On the other hand, are those who believe we should have not used any public policy. We have faced litigation which believes that we have been far too wreck less and should have not eased any of the original restrictions. On the other hand, there are those who believe we have been too stringent. Society is divided on how we should deal with this virus. However, we are all united in that it is a virus of unprecedented magnitude which requires all of us to sacrifice

and meet the challenge.

We are of the firm belief that it is not the Public Health response that depresses economies, but rather pandemics that depress economies.

Very little is known about the virus, so we must always act with caution. What we do know is that the virus moves from person to person. So, we must continue to limit our movements, and move only when it is absolutely necessary. Consequently, for those that carry comorbidities and those that can work from home please continue to do so. Our greatest weapon against this enemy is behavioural and hygiene adjustments. Maintain your 1,5 metre social distance, wash or sanitize your hands and wear a mask particularly at work and public spaces.

We have been encouraged by the support we have received from this house and the general public. We must further deepen the cooperation we have enjoyed from this house and the general public. Only through working together can we defeat this enemy.

In conclusion, I wish to conclude by reiterating the words of the President who said: *“because there is still much that is unknown about the rate and manner of the spread of the virus within our population. The action we take now must be measured and incremental.”*

**I thank you**