



EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY

**JOINT MINISTERIAL MEETING FOR THE MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR HEALTH AND MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR EAC AFFAIRS ON
THE COVID - 19 PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

25TH March, 2020

REPORT: SESSION OF THE MINISTERS

(Ref: EAC/HEALTH & EAC AFFAIRS /JMHE/2020)

**EAC SECRETARIAT,
EAC HEADQUARTERS BUILDING,
P.O. BOX 1096,
ARUSHA, TANZANIA.**

MARCH, 2020

1.1. INTRODUCTION

1.2. CONVENING OF THE MEETING

The Joint meeting of Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers Responsible for EAC Affairs was held by Video conference 25th March, 2020 to address the ongoing COVID -19 threat to the region with specific emphasis on interrupting transmission, containment of the disease, and addressing key challenges arising from implementation of preventive measures taken by the respective partner states in the region. Specifically, the meeting deliberated on the COVID-19 Pandemic focusing containment strategies to stem any spread of the disease in the region, and developing a clear plan to mitigate key observed challenges already identified in relation to measures implemented to respond to COVI-19 threats in the region.

1.3. CONSTITUTION OF THE BUREAU

In accordance with the EAC Rules of Procedure for convening EAC Policy Organ meetings, **Dr. Daniel NGAMIJE**, the Minister of Health, Ministry of Health, Republic of Rwanda chaired the meeting, while the rapporteur was **Hon. Adan Mohamed EGH**, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of East African Community and Regional Development from the Republic of Kenya, assisted by the EAC Secretariat.

1.4. PARTICIPATION

The meeting was attended by Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC Affairs, Home/Interior/Public Security, Disaster Risk Response and preparedness, Works and Transport, among others. The meeting was also attended by Officials from the EAC Partner States' National Health Research and Academic Institutions, Interior/Public Security, Disaster Risk Response and preparedness, Works and Transport, among others. The meeting was facilitated by the EAC Secretariat, the East Africa Health Research Commission (EAHRC) and the East Africa Civil Aviation and Oversight Authority (CASSOA).

1.5. AGENDA AND PROGRAMME OF THE MEETING

The agenda of the meeting was adopted with no modifications and is hereto attached as **Annexes A - II and Annex A - III** respectively.

1.6. OPENING OF THE MEETING

Opening Statement by Amb. Liberat Mfumukeko, the EAC Secretary General

The EAC Secretary General, **Amb. Liberat Mfumukeko**, welcomed delegates to the Joint Ministerial meeting for the Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC Affairs on the Covid - 19 pandemic preparedness and response. He particularly thanked the Partner States for availing time to deliberate on Coronavirus pandemic at this challenging period.

In an effort to addressing pandemic, he thanked the Development Partners representatives that supports region in a number of areas, particularly the Germany Development Bank (KfW) and GIZ through the Germany Government, who supports pandemic preparedness. He further highlighted that EAC Secretariat has procured a number of mobile laboratories which are now ready to be sent to Partner States for immediate use to help in critical situation. He also pointed that EAC Secretariat has trained a big number of Partner States Lab technicians in diagnosis and handling of Coronavirus and Ebola cases. He acknowledged the rapid response from Germany Government to provide EAC with emergency seed funds on Coronavirus to support training of Partner States points of entry staff including airports, sea ports and cross border staff among others.

Amb. Liberat Mfumukeko pointed out that, the rationale of convening the meeting that is, among others, to share existing knowledge and information, map up containment strategies to stem any further spread of COVID-19 pandemic in the EAC region. More importantly, he informed the meeting that EAC Secretariat has put in place an EAC Regional Coordination mechanism which has planned a number of activities to secure the EAC Organs and Institutions and support the Partner States.

Amb. Liberat Mfumukeko concluded his remarks by urging the Ministers to consider key agenda items on Coronavirus pandemic and he officially declared the meeting open

2. OVERVIEW OF THE BACKGROUND PAPER AND UPDATES FROM THE EAC SECRETARIAT REGIONAL COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR COVID – 19.

2.1. COVID -19 Situation in the EAC Region and Key Issues for Consideration

The meeting received updates on the COVID – 19 situation and noted that by 24th March 2020 a total of **372,757 confirmed (39,827 New Cases)** were

reported by WHO report 64¹. The Ministers noted that of 24th March 2020, the region has reported a total of 91 confirmed cases (Uganda: 14; Kenya: 25; Rwanda:40; and Tanzania: 12) in 4 out of the 6 Partner States. There were no confirmed cases from Republic of South Sudan and Republic of Burundi. Globally the total number of deaths is according to WHO was **16,231** deaths with zero deaths in East Africa. Whereas the Pandemic has been shown to be slowing down in China, the epicenter, its gaining momentum in other parts of the world specifically in Europe and in Africa, WHO has indicated that Africa is likely to experience the worst of this pandemic due to its weak health systems that would collapse under this pandemic unless strong measures are taken to prevent the spread of COVID – 19 in the region.

In response to this and the urgent need to prevent severe impact of the pandemic on the EAC region, the Ministers of Health noted that all Governments in the region had implemented measures to prevent / slow down / stem transmission of COVID19. The main emphasis of the measure taken was to reduce human infection, prevention of secondary transmission and international spread of the virus.

The Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC Affairs made the following Observations:

- i. Explore pre-entry quarantine, and screening of crew before crossing the borders in the region
- ii. For smooth operations, all truck operators were expected to have extra crew member just in case some are quarantined, the others maintain continuity and guarantee delivery of goods;
- iii. All Partner States had clear guidelines on COVID -19 Response that were being implemented;
- iv. All Partner States except the United Republic of Tanzania had closed their space to stop importation of COVID-19 cases for a period ranging from 7 days in Burundi to 30 days in Uganda, to be reviewed in due course;
- v. Partner States were implementing Mandatory quarantine for all travelers entering the Partner States at designated isolation / quarantine facilities, and self-isolation (at home) for all contacts traced and at risk;
- vi. Borders are open to facilitate free movement of Goods and Services in the region, and highlighted the importance of ensuring that no shortage of goods is created in the region as a result of implementation of the COVID -19 response measure (should not turn into a Non-Tariff Barrier);

¹ https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200324-sitrep-64-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=703b2c40_2

- vii. There is need for a clear tracking system for truck drivers who are cleared to move goods in the region;
- viii. Need to create self-reliance in the EAC region by facilitating local production of most of the COVID – 19 consumables in the region (disinfectants, sanitizers and drugs)
- ix. Partner States emphasized the need to minimize cross border movement of people in the region;
- x. All Partner States allowed cross-border movement of people (East Africans) but this was according to guidelines implemented to prevent importation of COVID 19 cases. All persons crossing any border in the region were for COVID -19 symptoms at all portal health at all border crossing points in the region, and were to be quarantined for 14 days except truck drivers and their crew;
- xi. The porousness of the borders was complicating cross border surveillance and screening activities for COVID -19, and highlighted the need to strengthen this area;
- xii. The need for effective mechanisms for contact tracing and information exchange / sharing among the EAC partner states on COVID -19 and a clear mechanism for sharing reports at regional level. The sharing of information for quick response, continuous reporting and immediate response with regards to contact tracing would strengthening surveillance in the region;
- xiii. The handover of Mobile laboratories procured under the EAC Mobile Laboratory Project to the EAC Partner States was delayed due to procurement challenges and also noted that some key equipment (PCR Machine) was to still missing. The Mobile Laboratory are expected to be delivered to the EAC Partner States in mid-April 2020;
- xiv. There was urgent need to establish the EAC Regional Response Team with experts from the EAC Partner States, EAC Secretariat and East Africa Health Research Commission (EAHRC) to coordinate the implementation of the **EAC Regional COVID-19 Response Plan**;
- xv. All Partner States were implementing Risk Communication, Social Distancing and were emphasizing awareness creation in the general population in COVID -19 in the EAC region;
- xvi. Need to explore pre-entry quarantine, and screening of crew before crossing the borders in the region;
- xvii. Partner States will cater for normal decontamination, as part of the national response plan to COVID – 19;
- xviii. All Partner States had East Africans from other countries (including students, tourists, workers, ordinary travelers) who had been affected by travel bans and closure of border and were unable to travel home. These either under quarantine, self-isolation and needed financial, administrative or support of some kind. The meeting noted

that it was the responsibility of the respective Embassies/Consulates in these countries to provide the need support to their citizens during this pandemic, and coordinate with the stakeholders to facilitate further action;

- xix. The need for a common, regional strategy for accessing testing kits for Corona Virus (especially those which are still in the process of development, once the tests are approved) for early identification of cases, and cure / medicines (once approved by the WHO);
- xx. Need for well synthesized evidence on COVID -19 current information on diagnostic, care and treatment, etc. to inform policy and response in the region;
- xxi. The region needs to put in place measures to facilitate Movement of surge capacity and medical counter measures to support our region to address the pandemic if need arises;
- xxii. need to ensure availability of soap and water in all communities in the EAC Partner State to ensure that infection prevention and control practices are practiced by all.
- xxiii. The EAC secretariat has planned activities including:
 - ✓ Handover of the laboratories to Partner States by 31st March 2020
 - ✓ Training of airport staff at all eight (8) International Airports in the EAC Partner States including baggage handlers, immigration and other key staff on COVID -19 prevention and control measures in collaboration with CASSOA, CDC, WHO, GIZ;
 - ✓ Procurement of COVID 19 test kits, equipment and other supplies;
 - ✓ Risk communication and community engagement on COVID -19; and
 - ✓ Developing an EAC Regional Covid-19 Dhis2 Surveillance Tracker
- xxiv. need to strengthen the surveillance and the laboratory testing capacity for COVID – 19 to ensure that all cases are detected in a timely manner all EAC partner States especially in Partner States
- xxv. noted the need to ensure that internal mechanism is allowed to work to limit movement of persons in the region, and allowing, flights / services for health emergencies; emergency landing due to technical problems, cargo planes, emergency and humanitarian flights, Know status of the preparedness of the secretariat, resources mobilized to support the region,
- xxvi. observed difficulty in movement of drivers at the cross borders and need to ensure immediate implementation of the recommendations;
- xxvii. the EAC Secretariat had mobilized resources and had procured more COVID -19 test Kits, and consumables for each Partner State, training of Airport staff, and cross border port health staff;
- xxviii. The EAC Secretariat had engaged the African Development bank and USAID KEA and was in the process of submitting a proposal for support to the region, and

xxix. The Ministers were informed that Trademark East Africa was willing to support Partner States with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other consumables.

The Joint meeting of Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC Affairs:

- a) directed all Partner States to continue implementing mandatory quarantine for 14 days for all travelers to the region, and avoid imported cases by implementing strict screening procedures at all border points (EAC/JMHE/ Directive /001);
- b) resolved to maintain suspension of EAC regional face-to-face meetings and urged EAC Organs and institutions to utilize Modern Technology such as video-conferences, Webinars and Skype Calls for holding such meetings until such a time when the situation has been contained (EAC/JMHE/Decision/001)
- c) directed all Partner States to implement 100% exit and entry screenings by applying the multilayer mechanism to avoid some loopholes, such as transit Passengers (EAC/JMHE/ Directive /002);
- d) resolved to minimize cross border movement of people while facilitating free movements of Goods and Services in the EAC region (EAC/JMHE/Decision /002);
- e) directed the EAC Secretariat in collaboration with the Partner States to establish a linkage between the national task forces, EAC Secretariat, and, EAHRC to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response plan (EAC/JMHE/Directive/003);
- f) directed the EAC Secretariat to finalize and submit the EAC Regional COVID-19 Response plan to the EAC Partner States by 30th March, 2020 (EAC/JMHE/Directive/004);
- g) directed the EAC Secretariat to establish a mechanism to facilitate movement of surge capacity and medical counter measures across borders to support in responding to the pandemic if need arises (EAC/JMHE/Directive/005);
- h) Directed all Partner States to ensure that trucks / vehicles carrying goods:
 - i. have only 2 - 3 crew members per vehicle to facilitate smooth border crossing in the region;

- ii. crew members are in good health, crew screened and found be at high risk or positive for COVID-19, the truck will be decontaminated before its allowed to continues to its final destination and the crew members will be quarantined for 14 days according to the set national guidelines;
 - iii. in the event that the crew are quarantined while in transit, truck owners / operators make necessary arrangements to backup crew to ensure that good are delivered to the intended destination;
 - iv. truck drivers are required to declare their final destination and are urged to stop only at designated points along the transport corridors so as to limit chances of spread of COVID-19 during transit;
 - v. the crew for cargo planes and vessels will be determined by the specifications of the aircraft or ship and set international guidelines. The crew will be quarantined at a government designated hotel for the period of their stay (EAC/JMHE/Directive/006);

- i) Directed the Partner States to establish a surveillance system to monitor crew health and enable contact tracing (EAC/JMHE/Directive/007);

- j) Directed the Partner States and EAC Secretariat to strengthen information sharing through press conferences and other channels to facilitate quick response, continuous reporting and to facilitate contact tracing for potential COVID- 19 exposed persons (EAC/JMHE/Directive/008);

- k) Directed all Partner States to identify a focal person a member of the national task force to facilitate communication between the Partner States, and between Partner States and the EAC Secretariat for the COVID response (EAC/JMHE/Directive/009);

- l) Directed the EAHRC to synthesize and conduct research on COVID -19 to inform the Partner States on new technologies, advances in care and treatment, vaccines, behavior of the virus, diagnostic among others, to inform policy and practice in the region (EAC/JMHE/ Directive /010);

- m) urged respective EAC Partner States' Embassies and High commissions to coordinate their citizens who may have been affected by the closure of borders and to enable them move to their final destination in the EAC region (EAC/JMHE/Decision/003);

- n) directed the Partner States to support local companies, to ensure the local production and availability of key consumables / products used in COVID -19 response including Hand sanitizers, medical products, soap, among others (EAC/JMHE/Directive/0011);**
- o) Directed the EAC Secretariat to expedite procurement of planned COVID -19 Test Kits, and their delivery to the respective Countries (EAC/JMHE/Directive/0012);**
- p) Urged willing Partner States to make arrangement to collect their incomplete Mobile Laboratories from the EAC Secretariat, and the missing equipment (PCR machine) to be delivered to the Partner States by Mid-April 2020 (EAC/JMHE/Decision/004);**
- q) Directed the EAC Secretariat in collaboration with the EAC Partner States to develop a Regional Strategy for accessing Coronavirus testing kits (especially those which are still in the process of development- once the tests are approved) for early identification of cases, and cure / medicines (once approved by the WHO) (EAC/JMHE/Directive/0013); and**
- r) directed all Partner States to provide additional contingency and emergency funds to address gaps in prevention, impact mitigation and other interventions to mitigate impact of COVID -19 and further urged EAC Secretariat and each Partner State to mobilize resources, and invest in public health systems to ensure resilience and health security (EAC/JMHE/Directive/0014)**

4.0 Convening the 2nd Joint meeting

The Ministers agreed to reconvene the Joint meeting of Ministers responsible for Health and Ministers responsible for EAC Affairs to re-evaluate the situation regularly.

5.0 A.O.B

There being on other business, the meeting was ended at 20.30 hours.

Signed by the EAC Ministers Responsible for Health and EAC Ministers Responsible for EAC Affairs on this 25th Day of March, 2020.

					
Hon. Dr. Daniel Ngamije	Hon. Adan Mohamed EGH	Hon. Dr. Thaddee Ndikumana	Hon. Umyy Ally Mwalimu	Hon. John Luk Jok	Hon. Maganda Julius Wandera
Minister of Health	Cabinet Secretary	Minister of Public Health and Fight against HIV/AIDS	Minister of Health	Minister of East African Community Affairs	Minister of State for East African Community Affairs
Ministry of Health	Ministry of East African Community and Regional Development	Ministry of Public Health and Fight against HIV/AIDS	Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children	Ministry of East African Community Affairs	Ministry of East African Community Affairs
REPUBLIC OF RWANDA	REPUBLIC OF KENYA	REPUBLIC OF BURUNDI	THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA	REPUBLIC OF SOUTH SUDAN	REPUBLIC OF UGANDA