



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA**  
**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**STATEMENT BY SEN. MUTAHI KAGWE, EGH,  
CABINET SECRETARY FOR HEALTH,  
AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY COVID-19 RESPONSE  
SYMPOSIUM.  
NAIROBI SERENA HOTEL.**

**22<sup>ND</sup> OCTOBER, 2020**

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**His Excellence the Governor of Isiolo County and Chair  
of County of Governors Health Sub-committee Dr.  
Mohammed Kuti,  
Diplomatic Representative, Aga Khan Development  
Network, Dr. Azim Lakhani,  
Aga Khan University Vice Provost, Dr. Alex Awiti  
Invited Guests, Participants on the virtual platform,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Many are the times when we sit back in our offices and homes feeling desperate and dejected when we observe goings in various sectors of our country. When Covid-19 pandemic struck, we all looked up to the government for solutions to a problem that at the time was fast overwhelming the entire globe. Whenever a challenge strikes, we all have ideas on what should be done to contain those challenges. Its especially difficult when you are in government and have to determine the best solutions for all. It therefore gives me great pleasure to be here today to dialogue with experts in the field of medicine and other fields on our response measures. It is a distinct pleasure to be here today and to have this opportunity to make a few remarks at this meeting. Let me say from the very outset that although the Covid-19 disease is largely a health issue, its containment is not a singular health response and therefore our response measures weren't and will never be.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

When the Coronavirus 2019 was first reported in Wuhan China, none of us could have anticipated its spread across the world and indeed, its impact on all of us. We watched in horror as the

rest of world, especially global north, struggled to contain a virus that seemed to run amok, disrupting people's businesses and shutting down cities and countries. The experience of these countries was so shocking for us in the developing that we were all so scared of the day the virus hit our countries. When later, Egypt announced Africa's first COVID-19 case, its reality became stark: We knew then that its tentacles had stretched into our continent and that it was only a matter of time before it struck us. As we all know, Kenya is a hub for international NGOs and media not to mention most of Africa's air traffic, and therefore our clock was ticking. The Ministry of Health, through the emergency operations centre was on high alert, putting in place surveillance plans to arrest the situation and ensure it did not overrun our health care system as witnessed in some other countries.

I recall these moments that transitioned us from this period into March 13th, 2020, the day on which our first case was confirmed, I remember them explicitly because I understood our status and the stakes at hand.

Excluding the nations which had catalogued experience on airborne pandemics, Kenya resembled the rest of the world with regard to our collective preparedness for this scourge. Despite

our varying development status, we each found ourselves in a scramble for the financial and material resources such as PPEs that were urgently required. Core to this, was the imperative to protect our human capital; the precious healthcare workers who to this day, devote endless hours to ensure our wellbeing.

Its worth noting that prior to the confirmation of the first case, indeed prior to the confirmation of the first case globally, our health care system was challenged, dealing with a myriad of other diseases, but given that these were not considered public health emergencies of international concern, we were getting by. The emergence of Covid-19 presented a new challenge to the health care system and the country at large, putting our overall preparedness to deal with such emergencies to the test.

In the period since our first case, like the rest of the world, we've suffered through wage losses, faced our vulnerabilities and worst, witnessed the grief of having lost numerous lives. As of today, the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, there have been 40 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 globally with over 1.2 million deaths reported. In Kenya, we have recorded over 45,600 confirmed cases, 32,760 recoveries and 858 deaths which have been spread across all our 47 counties. The last few weeks have

particularly witnessed a sharp increase in our positivity rate with latest statistics 10.1% recorded yesterday.

**Ladies and Gentlemen, as we sit here today to reflect on our country's response, some questions come to mind? For instance, could this situation have been handled better? In other words, is it possible that we could not have so many confirmed cases and deaths? Could we even have managed to stop the virus from entering the country? Did we prepare the country well to deal with the emerging situation? Is there anything we could have done differently?**

As we reflect on our response, may I say this; that Covid-19 was a new health pandemic that we had not experienced before not just as a country, but rather as the entire world. But then we know this. What we did not know, and it continues to challenge us, is how the virus would evolve over time, how different people would fight it in their own bodies, what role, if any the environment would play in fighting it and a whole lot more issues that remain the subject of research globally. We knew then, as we do now, there was a need to have a health care system that was protected from being overrun by ensuring that infection was contained to a minimum. We also knew then, as we do now and

even better, that social and physical distancing, wearing of masks and washing of hands were our best weapons against the virus. We knew then, and later confirmed it, that individual responsibility remained critical to the fight against the pandemic.

Given what we knew, the government embarked on what we called an all government approach to the pandemic. This all government approach saw us establish the National Emergency Response Committee (NERC) that I chair. It consists of senior government officials representing various ministries and state departments.

This committee put in place a contingency plan to inform the government response. It was big on our health response, after all it was and continues to remain a public health emergency, but it also addressed itself to other challenges that were to affect our people. As we gather here and participate in this forum therefore, it's important to remember that although health is the starting point in our response, it's by no means the end nor the only area we should be focusing on in our deliberations. In the same way, we should remember that the fight against the pandemic, though led by the government, is by no means a fight by the government alone but rather a holistic societal engagement that has at its centre individual response. The

Government continues to do its duty of facilitation, and by government I mean, the national and county governments, but the real action of avoiding infection is in our communities, families and individual door steps. Speaking of County governments, may I say we are extremely glad with the way in which we have continued to collaborate in our mitigation measures. Thank you very much Governor Kuti and your colleagues for the continued engagement in the fight against this pandemic. In a way, we are lucky that this pandemic struck after the promulgation of our constitution and the establishment of devolved structures without which I shudder at the thought of how we could have managed.

As we reflect on our response, we also need to remember that notwithstanding the tremendous pressures placed on us by COVID-19, we are better off and stronger for it as a nation in numerous ways. There are many silver linings to our coronavirus experience that we should be grateful for, foremost, the fact that thus far, the pandemic has not descended on us in the apocalyptic manner that had been predicted despite the marked recent spikes that we need to be aware of and confront. We have been blessed in this way, and we need to take cognizance of it. We must also acknowledge and appreciate that despite a myriad of challenges, Kenya has contained the spread of COVID-

19 and its attendant devastation, quite remarkably. Perhaps critical to our response was the all government approach in the response, with leadership from the top by none other than His Excellency the President himself.

Our response included the formation of the COVID-19 National Taskforce in January 2020, the multi-agency approach through the National Emergency Response Committee that I have mentioned, the cascading of efforts to the county level through the County Emergency Response Committees, and the activation of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre which continues to provide the public with daily situation reports of COVID-19 pandemic in line with the International Health Regulations of 2005.

As we further reflect on our response, it's important to ask ourselves whether we brought all the partners we could have on board and whether these partners or partnerships have worked for us.

May I thank the many volunteers, healthcare workers, state and non-state actors, who have continued to journey with us in our fight. Without these partnerships, our fight would perhaps not



have been as effective, but then again this is something to reflect upon as well.

Together, we have successfully inculcated a mindset of hand washing, sanitizing, masking and social distancing that has minimized digestive ailments and slowed the spread not just of corona but other illnesses as well. From a capacity perspective, we needed to pay attention to our resources, human, capital and even technological. Following this attention, our country has shifted from a deep shortfall in isolation space and a lack of capacity to attend to the critically ill, to having over 7,000 isolation beds and close to 400 ICU beds across our 47 counties. We have scaled up our diagnostic capacity which was defined by two testing laboratories prior to COVID-19, to 39 laboratories spread across 12 counties, and we have hired and trained a new cohort of healthcare workers to complement our existing capacity.

When we reflect on our journey with COVID-19 - - for one day we shall - - we will be able to record the positive impact that these measures have had not only on our ongoing efforts to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC), but also on the tangible difference they have had on our overall health status. Our enhanced capacity will far outlive COVID-19;

coupled with the current effort to strengthen the ministry's supply chain processes that will ensure the transparent, efficient and cost-effective delivery of healthcare services, this country will be well positioned to offer not only Kenyan citizens the best quality of care, but also others in the region.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I wish to conclude by thanking the Aga Khan University through the Graduate School of Media and Communication for putting this together and gathering us here today. When history books are written, we shall remember that ours is a government that cared to listen to emerging voices on our response and yours an institution willing to stake its neck to help in the building of a more resilient and responsive country. Our fight against this pandemic and indeed all challenges facing our society require synergy and partnerships and these are built through dialogue such as what I hope will happen here. It's always easy to blame one another but we must never forget that Kenya is our country and its only us, all of us, together, who will help make a difference for the good of all of us.

Thanks again to all present and may our collective energies continue to place us on a path to achieving the greatest wealth of all...which is our health.

**Thank You.**

**SEN. MUTAHI KAGWE, EGH,  
CABINET SECRETARY.**