

WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 2 November 2020

2

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- *I have been identified as a contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. I am well and without symptoms but will self quarantine in the coming days, in line with WHO protocols.*
- *Over the weekend we saw that while many countries have brought COVID-19 under control, cases in some countries in Europe and North America continue to spike.*
- *In some countries, we're seeing cases go up exponentially and hospitals reach capacity, which poses a risk to patients and health workers alike.*
- *We need countries to again invest in the basics so that measures can be lifted safely and governments can hopefully avoid having to take these measures again.*

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

I want to start by saying that WHO has been following closely the situation with Typhoon Goni in the Philippines.

This is the strongest storm of 2020 and WHO will work with the government to ensure emergency medical care is reaching those that need it.

Our thoughts are with all those affected.

I have been identified as a contact of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

I am well and without symptoms but will self quarantine in the coming days, in line with WHO protocols.

At this time, it is critically important that we all comply with health guidance.

This is how we will break chains of transmission, suppress the virus, and protect health systems.

Over the weekend we saw that while many countries have brought COVID-19 under control, cases in some countries in Europe and North America continue to spike.

This is another critical moment for action.

Another critical moment for leaders to step up.

And another critical moment for people to come together for a common purpose.

Seize the opportunity, it's not too late.

We all have a role to play in suppressing transmission and we have seen across the world that it's possible.

We have released videos featuring multiple countries demonstrating their comprehensive responses to COVID-19.

This includes New Zealand, Rwanda, Thailand, the Republic of Korea, Italy and Spain.

And today, a new video was released that highlighted Mongolia's success in responding to COVID-19.

Mongolia has so far had no deaths or local transmission.

And what Mongolia and all these stories show is that there are shared lessons that we can all learn from.

And we all have a role to play in suppressing transmission.

In some countries, we're seeing cases go up exponentially and hospitals reach capacity, which poses a risk to patients and health workers alike.

This is leaving health workers with difficult decisions to make on how to prioritise care for those that are sick.

To understand more about how hospitals can prepare and cope with COVID-19, I am pleased to be joined by three health specialists.

First, I would like to introduce you to Professor YaeJean Kim who is joining us from the Republic of Korea to reflect on their experience tackling COVID-19.

Professor, you have the floor.

Thank you, Professor YaeJean, I know it's late where you are so especially grateful for your time.

I would now like to hand over to the Professor Mervyn Mer of University of Wits, South Africa. Professor Mer is also Director of intensive care at Charlotte Maxeke in Johannesburg.

Sir, the floor is yours Professor Mer.

Thank you Professor Mer, for sharing your lessons from South Africa's COVID-19 response, Ubuntu.

Finally, I would like to introduce you to Dr. Marta Lado, from Spain.

Dr. Lado was the Chief Medical Officer for Partners in Health in Sierra Leone and the senior clinical lead in the intensive care unit for COVID-19 at '34 military hospital' in Freetown.

Thank you, Dr Lado. We're pleased that you have recently joined WHO and will be using your experience from Sierra Leone to drive our work on clinical case-management. Muchos Gracias

That caps three amazing stories and there are many lessons from the Republic of Korea, South Africa and Sierra Leone that can help other countries suppress the virus, save lives and protect health workers and hospitals.

It really reinforces that while some countries are putting in place measures to ease the pressure on the health system, there is also now an opportunity to build stronger systems.

Ensuring quality testing, tracing and treatment measures are implemented are all key.

And we need countries to again invest in the basics so that measures can be lifted safely and governments can hopefully avoid having to take these measures again.

On a macro level, this also reflects why a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach to sustainable global preparedness is so important.

Health systems and preparedness are not only an investment in the future, they are the foundation of our response today.

Public health is more than medicine and science, and it is bigger than any individual.

And there is hope that if we invest in health systems, health workers and share tools through the ACT-Accelerator, we can bring this virus under control and go forward, together, to tackle other challenges of our time.

We have to keep going and whether I'm at home or in the office, WHO will keep working to drive forward science, solutions and solidarity.

I thank you.