

ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,
NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO,
ON UPDATES TO GHANA'S ENHANCED RESPONSE TO THE
CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC, ON SUNDAY, 31ST MAY, 2020.

Fellow Ghanaians, good evening.

I have come again, for the tenth (10th) time, into your homes to speak to you about the Coronavirus pandemic, share with you information about the fight against the virus, and outline to you the decisions I have taken about the next chapter of our common battle.

I thank each and every one of you for the collective and individual effort you have put in to help contain the spread of the disease on our shores. The great majority of us continue to adhere to the social distancing and enhanced hygiene protocols; we have, as a result, altered our way of life to accommodate these changes; and we continue to make sacrifices to speed up the process of bringing our lives safely back to a state of normalcy. We have demonstrated not only to ourselves, but also to the entire world, that we are capable of charting our own path towards containing the spread of this disease. We must all be proud that we have become a reference point for others on how to combat it.

In all of this, I say a special ayekoo to our heroic healthcare workers, our efficient teams of contact tracers and testers, our farsighted scientists, our professional security personnel, and responsible members of our media, who have done a yeoman's job over the last eleven (11) weeks in the fight. Your efforts are truly appreciated, and the Ghanaian people will always be in your debt.

When the first two cases were confirmed on 12th March, 2020, we took timely measures to attack the virus. We decided that we would, (i) limit and stop the importation of the virus, (ii) contain its spread, (iii) provide adequate care for the sick, (iv) limit the impact of the virus on social and economic life, and (v) use the opportunity afforded by the emergency to expand our domestic capability and deepen our self-reliance.

To attain these objectives, and respond to the clear evidence that large gatherings provide the most fertile grounds for the spread of the virus, on 15th March, three (3) days later, under the Imposition of Restrictions Act, 2020, Act 1012, I placed a ban on public gatherings and closed down all schools and universities. On 21st March, I closed all our borders by land, air and sea. Subsequently, on 27th March, I placed restrictions on movement of persons in the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area, Tema, Kasoa, and the Greater Kumasi Metropolitan Area and contiguous districts, for a period of three (3) weeks.

In view of the obvious economic difficulties that the tough measures brought, I also announced far-reaching reliefs to ease the economic and social burden on households and businesses. These included subsidies on utilities for all, tax reliefs and financial packages for businesses, and incentives for our frontline health workers.

Fellow Ghanaians, as at today, Sunday, 31st May, under these measures, we have conducted two hundred and eighteen thousand, four hundred and twenty-five (218,425) tests; the number of positive cases stands at eight thousand and seventy (8,070); two thousand, nine hundred and forty-seven (2,947) persons have recovered; thirty-six (36) have sadly died; thirteen (13) persons are severely ill, with three (3) critically-ill for which (1) is on a ventilator; and five thousand and eighty-seven are responding to treatment at home, isolation centres and hospitals.

Our hospitalisation and death rates have been, persistently, very low, some of the lowest in Africa and in the world. The Ghanaian people are not dying of the virus in the hundreds and thousands that were earlier anticipated, and that are being seen on a daily basis in some other countries. Indeed, we are witnessing a much milder manifestation of the virus in the country, than was initially feared. And, I dare say, that it is the grace of God, and the measures taken by Government that have produced this result.

Our ability to trace, test, and treat persons with the virus has improved considerably; we now have a large army of efficient contact tracers; we have expanded the number of testing facilities from two (2) to ten (10) across the country; and we have increased appreciably the number of quarantine, isolation and treatment centres. We have lessened our dependence on

foreign imports, and scaled up significantly domestic production and distribution of personal protective equipment to our healthcare workers, evidenced in the provision of four million, four hundred and forty thousand, six hundred and ninety (4,440,690) gloves; three million, five hundred and twenty four thousand, two hundred and five (3,524,205) nose masks; sixty two thousand, one hundred and ninety-four (62,194) goggles; one hundred and nine thousand, eight hundred and twenty-nine (109,829) litres of sanitizers; eighty five thousand, nine hundred and ninety-five (85,995) head covers; eighty two thousand, six hundred and fifty-five (82,655) gowns; fifty three thousand, five hundred and seventeen (53,517) medical scrubs; and forty three thousand, six hundred and thirty-three (43,633) N-95 face masks.

As I have already said, everything that has been achieved, so far, would not have been possible without the strong co-operation of you, the Ghanaian people. I know, at firsthand, the devastating impact the measures employed to defeat the virus has had on our social, religious, cultural and economic lives, as well as on our jobs, and the education of our children, and yet, because of love of country, we have borne with them. I know, however, that we cannot live with these restrictions forever, and that it is imperative we find a safe way to return our lives to normality, as other nations across the globe are trying to do.

This has informed the stakeholder consultations that have occurred over the last few weeks with entities in the health, labour, religious, chieftaincy, educational, hospitality, transport, sports, tourism and creative arts sectors. These consultations have hinged on an analysis of the data gathered and the adoption of best practices and experiences of other countries that have attempted to move on in the wake of the pandemic.

A consensus has emerged from these consultations that we should embark on a strategic, controlled, progressive, safe easing of restrictions to get our lives and economy back to normal. As I stated in my May Day address, a month ago, I am now in a position to outline the roadmap for easing safely the restrictions. Ours is going to be a phased approach, involving a selected list of public gatherings, based on their risk profile, socio-economic impact, and, most importantly, our capacity to enforce and to respond, in the event of a flare up in our number of infections.

So, fellow Ghanaians, with effect from Friday, 5th June, we will begin Stage One of the process of easing restrictions.

An abridged format for religious services can commence. Twenty-five percent (25%) attendance, with a maximum number of one hundred (100) congregants, can worship at a time in church or at the mosque, with a mandatory one metre rule of social distancing between congregants. In addition to the mandatory wearing of masks for all persons at all times in churches and mosques, a register of names and contact details of all worshippers and hand washing facilities and sanitisers must be provided, with a maximum duration of one (1) hour for each service.

Religious institutions that are desirous of opening their premises to their members, such as churches, mosques and others, must disinfect, fumigate and put in place the requisite logistics needed to guarantee safe opening and operation. They must work with the designated, regulatory bodies and undertake test runs of the protocols I have outlined. I would appeal to them, in the case of Christians, on the first Sunday of re-opening, i.e. 7th June, in the case of the Adventists, Saturday, 6th June, and in the case of Muslims, on the first Friday, i.e. Ṣalāt al-Jumu‘ah on 5th June, to dedicate their worship to prayers for the nation in these challenging times. The Minister for Religious Affairs, will, tomorrow, Monday, 1st June, outline, in detail, the specific guidelines for the safe reopening of our churches and mosques.

From Monday, 15th June, 2020, the decision has been taken, after engagement with the Teacher Unions, whose co-operation I salute, to re-open schools and universities to allow for final year junior high, senior high and university students to resume classes ahead of the conduct of their respective exit examinations. Indeed, final year university students are to report to their universities on 15th June; final year senior high school (SHS 3) students, together with SHS 2 Gold Track students, on 22nd June; and final year junior high school (JHS 3) students on 29th June. JHS 3 classes will comprise a maximum of thirty (30) students; SHS classes a maximum of twenty-five (25) students; and University lectures will take place with half the class sizes.

All final year students of educational and training institutions, which are being managed by Ministries other than the Education Ministry, are to return to school on 15th June to complete their exit examinations.

Again, prior to the opening of schools and universities, the Ministry of Education, and the heads of public and private educational institutions, will fumigate and disinfect their institutions. Each student, teacher, and non-teaching staff will be provided with re-usable face masks by the Ministry of Education. For the avoidance of doubt, all other educational facilities, private and public, for non-final year students, will remain closed. The Minister for Education, in the coming days, will outline, in detail, the specific guidelines for the safe reopening of our schools and universities.

Private burials, now with a maximum of one hundred (100) persons, can continue to be performed. Restaurants, providing seated services, can operate under appropriate social distancing arrangements and hygiene protocols. Individual, non-contact sports can go ahead. Conferences, workshops, weddings, and political activities, except rallies, can now take place, but with limited numbers not exceeding one hundred (100) persons present, with the appropriate social distancing and hygiene protocols.

Market places, work places, public transport, and constitutional and statutory bodies such as the Electoral Commission, the National Commission for Civic Education and the National Identification Authority, whose activities were exempted from the outset from these restrictions, must conduct their activities in accordance with social distancing and the necessary hygiene and safety protocols.

Whilst we step up public education of the protocols on public gatherings, let me also state that regulatory agencies will undertake random checks to ensure conformity with these rules, and the security services will be tasked to enforce them. Should any institution fail to adhere to these directives, its activity will be immediately prohibited, and relevant sanctions applied.

I have, by Executive Instrument, provided for these new directions, and extended the suspension of the remaining public gatherings, as set out in E.I. 64 of 15th March, until 31st July. In here, I refer to the suspension of sporting events, nightclubs, cinemas, drinking spots, bars, beaches, festivals,

funerals, political rallies, and large religious gatherings such as crusades, pilgrimages and conventions.

Our border, by air, land and sea, remains closed until further notice for human traffic. However, given that there are Ghana residents stranded abroad, special dispensation is going to be given for their evacuation back to Ghana, where they will be subjected to the mandatory quarantine and safety protocols.

Fellow Ghanaians, it is said that with greater freedom comes greater responsibility. The introduction of this phased opening up of our country means that each and every one of us must continue to remain vigilant, and respect the enhanced hygiene and social distancing protocols that have become part and parcel of our daily routine over the last three (3) months. We cannot afford to let our guard down, and ruin the successes we have chalked over this period.

Yes, there exists the possibility of a potential surge in infections. As a precautionary measure, we have strengthened further our existing national, regional and district response teams, with the support of the security forces, to step up to deal with any eventuality. Over recent weeks, we have learnt from the cases at the fish processing plant in Tema, and in the Obuasi municipality, how to deal with such sudden spikes. We will continue to learn, review and adjust where and when we need to do so. We will only proceed with this staggered opening up of our country when it is safe to do so.

Fellow Ghanaians, now, more than ever, we must adhere to enhanced personal hygiene and social distancing protocols, wash our hands with soap under running water, refrain from shaking hands, and wear our masks whenever we leave our homes. In the Ghanaian context, it has been established that the cases of comorbidity, i.e. underlying health conditions, that are associated with almost all the COVID-related deaths, are mainly diabetes and hypertension. The risk factors for these diseases are being overweight, eating refined foods, too much salt and sugar in meals, inadequate physical exercise, excessive alcohol intake, and smoking. It is, thus, crucial that we improve our fitness levels, and adopt healthy eating practices that incorporate our local food stuffs, which boost our immune

systems. Persons with these diseases must take extra precautions, and take their treatment seriously.

I am calling upon the Ministry of Information, the National Commission for Civic Education and the media to intensify public education of these protocols and directions. I entreat all religious, traditional, community and opinion leaders to continue to partner with government in engaging, mobilising and enforcing adherence to social distancing and personal hygiene practices in their respective communities.

Fellow Ghanaians, as I stated in my fifth (5th) address to the nation, we will protect people's lives, then their livelihoods. It is this principle that guided the decision to impose restrictions, and continues to guide me today. The fact of the matter is that the measures we have taken appear, by the grace of God, to be working, our healthcare system is, so far, not overwhelmed, and, you, the Ghanaian people, have largely embraced the principles of social distancing, the wearing of masks, and the enhanced hygiene protocols, which are our most effective defences against the virus.

We have learnt many lessons from this pandemic. The most obvious is that we have to fortify urgently our public health system. We have committed to the implementation of 'Agenda 88', that is building, within a year, a fully-equipped, functional district hospital for each district that does not have one, and a fully-equipped, functional regional hospital for each of the new regions, together with a new regional hospital for the Western Region, and the rehabilitation of Effia Nkwanta Hospital in Sekondi. We have to empower and increase the number of our healthcare professionals across board. Universal Health Coverage must become reality for all Ghanaians, not a slogan, for every Ghanaian deserves good health and good healthcare. We need to focus our energies on ensuring access of poor people to decent housing. We can no longer ignore this basic requirement of social justice. We have to make the things we use, and grow the foods we eat. We have to come out of this crisis better, stronger and more united than before. Ghana, free, united, socially just, self-reliant and productive, that is the Ghana we are going to create together after we have defeated this virus.

Fellow Ghanaians, ultimately, the Battle is the Lord's, and, with faith in Him, we will emerge from this greater than before. We are one people, we are

Ghanaians, and we stand together in joy and in times of trouble. We are a people with an exceptional history, and we are the proud promoters of the Black Star of Africa. We have all gone down together, we should all rise together. This too shall pass!!

May God bless us all, and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong.

I thank you for your attention and have a good night.