



**REMARKS BY AFRICAN UNION CHAIRPERSON PRESIDENT CYRIL  
RAMAPHOSA AT THE VIRTUAL MEETING WITH AU REGIONAL  
EXECUTIVE COMMUNITIES CHAIRS**

**29 APRIL 2020**

Your Excellencies,

Allow me to express my deep gratitude to you, the Chairpersons of the Regional Economic Communities of the AU, for availing yourselves to discuss the scourge of COVID-19 on the continent.

We are confronted with an unprecedented public health crisis, which poses a real existential threat, with far-reaching socio-economic consequences.

While the numbers of infections in Africa at this time is lower than elsewhere in the world, we expect that the peak of infections in Africa will come later, with devastating consequences.

We are concerned about the impact the virus will have on our societies, our economies and our public health systems.

To effectively protect our people against the coronavirus, we urgently need more health workers, medical supplies and equipment, including ventilators.

The AU has undertaken various measures to contain the spread of the virus and to mitigate the economic fallout that will be caused by the virus,.

In my capacity as AU Chairperson, I have hosted two virtual meetings of the Bureau of the Assembly of AU Heads of State and Government.

Among other things, the Bureau agreed on the establishment of the AU COVID-19 Response Fund, a drive to raise additional funds for the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention and intensive lobbying of the international community, including the international financial institutions, for a comprehensive, robust economic stimulus package for Africa.

To date, we have managed to raise \$25 million for the Response Fund and an additional \$36.5 million to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention.

We have also appointed five African Union COVID-19 Special Envoys to follow up on pledges, mobilise further international support and campaign for international participation in the AU's COVID-19 economic intervention.

The five envoys are Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of Nigeria, Dr Donald Kaberuka of Rwanda, Mr Tidjane Thiam of Côte d'Ivoire, Mr Trevor Manuel of South Africa and Mr Benkhalfa Abderrahmane of Algeria.

I will soon be announcing the appointment of a special envoy from the Central African region.

We have addressed the virtual Summit of the G20 and a virtual joint meeting of the World Bank and IMF, underscoring the need for a comprehensive, robust economic stimulus package for Africa.

In these engagements we have called for, among other measures, the allocation of more Special Drawing Rights Allocations to Africa to provide much-needed liquidity to central banks, the corporate sector and SMEs.

We also argued for a waiver of all interest payments on multilateral and bilateral debt. This would provide the necessary fiscal space for African governments to devote all available resources to response and recovery.

This economic injection should support both the continent's immediate humanitarian needs and place the continent on a path towards economic recovery.

We further emphasised the need to ensure trade and investment flows are not further disrupted by measures inconsistent with WTO rules.

On Thursday last week, I chaired a successful video conference meeting of the Bureau of the Assembly with 21 African business leaders to obtain their support for the AU COVID-19 Strategy.

The meeting expressed its full support for a two-year debt standstill and a proposal to develop a plan for the restructuring of both private and bilateral debt. It was further stressed that grants from the World Bank to the poorest countries must be additional to what had already been planned.

In general, the response from the international community has been positive with various partners making pledges, offering debt relief measures and providing concrete support in the form of medical supplies.

We have been greatly assisted by the work of the World Health Organization.

We call on all African countries to unequivocally support the WHO and its Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

We should welcome the initiative by the WHO, together with many heads of state, to work together to accelerate the development of new vaccines, tests and treatments for COVID-19 and ensure equitable access worldwide.

I call on all African countries to support the pledging initiative that starts on 4 May and which is spearheaded by the European Union to mobilise significant resources towards this effort.

I would like to commend the work of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, which is at the centre of the continent's health response to COVID-19 and which is doing great work to assist Member States.

There is also an urgent need for economic sanctions against Sudan and Zimbabwe to be lifted, in order to provide the necessary space for these countries to devote their resources to the fight against COVID-19.

At this time, it is also vital that we intensify efforts to end all forms of violence, destabilisation and terrorism on the continent. If we are to be successful in overcoming the coronavirus pandemic, we need to work even harder to silence the guns – and to ensure that they remain silent.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the commendable efforts of African leaders in their respective countries to contain the virus and adopt measures to mitigate against its economic impact.

It is clear that this virus knows no borders or nationality.

In our response, it is therefore essential that we remain guided by the principles of unity, solidarity, collaboration and cooperation among African countries.

Working together – as leaders, as AU members states and as Regional Economic Communities – I have no doubt that our people will be spared from the worst effects of this global crisis and we will be able to place our continent on a path of recovery and reconstruction.

I thank you.

ISSUED BY THE PRESIDENCY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA AND AFRICAN UNION CHAIRPERSON