

AFRICAN UNION

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UNION AFRICAINE

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Rev 1

**Communique of the African Union (AU) Bureau of Heads of State and Government
Teleconference Meeting held on 3 April 2020.**

President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa, and Chairperson of the African Union (AU) convened a second and follow-up teleconference meeting of the AU Bureau of Heads of State and Government, on 3 April 2020, to discuss the African response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The following members of the Bureau participated in the teleconference meeting: President Abdel Fattah al Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt, President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita of the Republic of Mali, President Uhuru Kenyatta of the Republic of Kenya, and President Felix Tshisekedi of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat .

President Paul Kagame of the Republic of Rwanda, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of the Federal Republic of Ethiopia, President Macky Sall of the Republic of Senegal, and President Emmerson Mnangagwa of the Republic of Zimbabwe also participated in the teleconference. The Bureau received presentations from Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus the Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr John Nkengasong, Director of Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and President Emmanuel Macron of France.

Chairperson Faki briefed the Bureau on actions undertaken by the Commission on recommendations from the Bureau meeting on Covid19 held on 26 March 2020.

Dr John Nkengasong, Director of Africa CDC gave a continental update which highlighted rapidly increasing Covid-19 infection rates across the continent

Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus emphasised the importance of acting now to test and to guarantee equitable access to test kits, masks and personal protective equipment (PPEs), vaccines and therapeutics as soon as they become available.

The Bureau of Heads of State and Government commended the able stewardship of exemplary leadership of Dr Tedros in leading the global response to the pandemic.

The Heads of States highlighted the unprecedented threat that Covid-19 presents to the health of African citizens and to the continent's hard-won developmental and economic gains. They also recognised the imperative to establish humanitarian and trade corridors in a spirit of African solidarity and integration.

Given the urgent need for medical supplies and equipment, the Heads of states called for international cooperation and support while up-scaling local production on the continent.

The Heads of States noted with satisfaction progress made in operationalising the African Union Covid-19 Response Fund established on 26 March 2020 to which members pledged the sum of US\$12.5 million and an additional US\$4.5million to the Africa CDC.

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It was agreed to establish continental ministerial coordination committees on Health, Finance and Transport to coordinate in order to support the comprehensive continental strategy.

The Heads of States underscored the need for a comprehensive and coordinated continental approach, and to speak with one voice on Africa's priorities.

Cognizant of the devastating socio-economic and political impact of the pandemic on African countries, the Bureau reiterated the need for rapid and concrete support as pledged by the G20 and other international partners, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. It is critical that these institutions review their current disbursement policies to display flexibility and speed, including raising the availability of IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). The Bureau also echoed the call for a comprehensive stimulus package for Africa, including, deferred payments, the immediate suspension of interest payments on Africa's external public and private debt in order to create fiscal space for Covid-19 response measures.

Lifesaving supplies including PPEs, masks, gowns, and ventilators and other support devices are urgently needed. The Bureau commended the rapid action coordinated by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the Jack Ma Foundation in mobilising and distributing, with the support of the World Food Programme (WFP) and Africa CDC, over one million diagnostic tests, six million masks and 600,000 PPE items to all African Union member states in less than a week.

The Heads of States and Government strongly urged for the immediate lifting of all economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe and Sudan to allow them to adequately respond to the pandemic and save lives. The African Union has repeatedly called for the lifting of these punitive sanctions, which the Bureau consider intolerable and inhumane in the present context.

It was noted that the Sahel region need special attention in the light of terrorist activity, and pledge solidarity with the countries in this region who have to fight the twin scourge of terrorism and COVID-19.

The Heads of States and Government thanked President Emmanuel Macron for his strong support for Africa during the Extraordinary G20 Summit. The Bureau expressed its support for the proposals he raised regarding a comprehensive approach to mobilising international support for Africa's health, economic, humanitarian, and medical research priorities, which are aligned with the African position. The Bureau also acknowledged the commitment of the People's Republic of China for its support and solidarity with Africa.