

Press Release

Extraordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of March 23, 2020

The Council of Ministers met at the Dili Convention Center and approved the content of the letter of request for the declaration of a state of emergency to be sent to the President of the Republic, Francisco Guterres Lú Olo. The proposal aims to ensure that the Government has the necessary legal means to be able to intervene quickly in preventing the emergence of an outbreak of the new Coronavirus in Timor-Leste and, in the event that it takes place, take the necessary and appropriate measures to combat the spread of the virus. The Government believes that the prevention of the occurrence and spread in covid-19 national territory will require the adoption of some measures that will configure limitations and suspension of the exercise of some fundamental rights, freedoms and guarantees. Possible measures to be applied include restrictions on movement, non-essential public and private activities, agglomerations of people, religious events or celebrations, and compulsive confinement at home, or in a health facility. Upon receipt of the Government's request, the President of the Republic will convene the Council of State and the Superior Council of Defense and Security. Before the declaration of a state of emergency, the document will still be debated by the National Parliament for a period of not more than one day.

Several proposals for contingency measures presented by the members of the Council of Ministers were examined, to be implemented during the state of emergency, in order to strengthen prevention, awareness raising and response to COVID-19. Measures to support the population in the national territory and Timorese citizens abroad and to reduce the negative impacts on the national economy were also discussed.

The Deputy Minister for Strategic Development of Health, Bonifácio Maukoli dos Reis, presented to the Council of Ministers the current status on the ongoing activities to prepare and combat the spread of COVID-19 in Timor-Leste, in particular with regard to the preparation of isolation and treatment sites in Dili and at the land border in Batugade. The Deputy Minister also presented a proposal for an additional budget for the acquisition of medicines, for the adoption of prevention measures and for the rental, preparation, cleaning and safety of isolation sites.

The Prime Minister, Taur Matan Ruak, instructed the members of the Government to initiate a significant reduction in the presence of employees in the workplace, in order to keep only the minimum necessary for essential public services to continue in operation. Civil servants and contractors who are exempt from attending the workplace must continue their professional activities in their homes, where they remain in contact and in social separation together with their families.

The Prime Minister assured that there will be an incentive plan to strengthen the conditions of health personnel and of health and isolation facilities, equipment and medicines.

The Acting Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, Fidelis Leite Magalhães, presented a package of measures to reduce the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the national economy, at the emergency level and in terms of economic recovery.

The Minister of Justice, Manuel Cárceres da Costa, announced that today he will issue a decree for the suspension of visits to prisoners of all national prisons.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Dionísio Babo Soares, presented a draft Government Resolution, approved by the Council of Ministers, for the purchase of medicines and equipment from China and informed that he is also in contact with other international partners, notably Australia and Cuba, which are available to support Timor-Leste in accessing medicines, ventilators and other health equipment.

The Minister of Transport and Communications, José Agostino da Silva, informed the members of the Council of Ministers that a telephone line was created for information on COVID-19. The number is 119 and will be available from the morning of March 24, 2020.

Currently, there is 1 confirmed case of COVID-19 in Timor-Leste. The World Health Organization (WHO) has so far recorded a total of 292,142 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the report of 22 March 2020.

Finally, the Acting Minister of Finance said that four projects were approved by the Infrastructure Fund's Board of Directors to deal with the damage caused by the floods of March 13, 2020. These projects include the creation of river containment walls, cleaning activities and water and sanitation and electricity infrastructure. **ENDS**