

## Africa moves to avert a catastrophe

Tensions are soaring across the continent as Covid-19 which has ravaged Asia, the Americas and Europe sets its sights on Africa. And **Legalbrief** reports that the WHO and medical experts around the world are particularly worried about a continent which is vulnerable to pandemics. Kenyan police today used teargas to disperse traders and shoppers at a street market in the city of Kisumu, after the government ordered a shutdown to prevent the spread of the virus. President Andry Rajoelina has ordered lockdowns in Madagascar's two main cities – Antananarivo and Toamasina – and any transport, except for goods, is prohibited. **‘Those who don't respect these measures will suffer severe penalties,’** he warned in a televised address. Gambian authorities are searching for 14 people who broke out of a hotel where they had been quarantined as a coronavirus precaution and escaped. The group was among 32 passengers who arrived on a flight from the UK on Wednesday and were placed in quarantine in the hotel in the capital Banjul. A report on the **Africa Feeds** site notes that Health Minister Ahmadou Lamin Samateh said some quarantined passengers ‘apparently became aggressive’ and fled. He added that the incident was ‘very, very detrimental’ and was a threat to the entire nation.

### *In other developments:*

\* **Nigeria is shutting schools from today and limiting religious meetings in Lagos and Abuja.** Imposing the restrictions in chaotic and overcrowded Lagos will be a major challenge for the authorities, with the city home to so-called ‘megachurches’ where thousands of worshippers gather each weekend.

\* **And doctors in Abuja, have gone on an ‘indefinite strike’ over delayed pay and unsafe working conditions.** Roland Aigbovo, president of the Abuja branch of The Doctor's Association, warned that other health workers at government-run hospitals in the city would join the strike if their demands were not met.

\* **Kenyan nurses at a coronavirus isolation ward in Nairobi have also started a go-slow to protest against working conditions.**

\* **Four Covid-19 positive patients, among the first group identified as carrying the virus upon their return from Italy, are demanding to be released from quarantine in Durban's Addington Hospital. On Friday, their attorney Mark Futcher said his clients would seek the court's intervention this week if they were not released.**

\* **Sierra Leone has suspended all flights incoming and outgoing from Saturday until further notice.** The former British colony was battered by the 2014 Ebola outbreak.

\* **Thirteen South Africans say they have been left stranded in Morocco** after Pretoria last week announced that it was suspending all international flights.

\* **A Zimbabwean Government spokesperson has warned the public not to attend church services, warning that worshippers risked going to hell. ‘A quick survey around town (the capital Harare) shows a lot of religious activity above 100 people,’ Nick Mangwana tweeted. ‘Let's be responsible. All of us will die. And then go to hell,’** he said.

\* **Senegal has authorised six flights to pick up stranded travellers in the capital Dakar** and fly them to Paris. All mosques in the city have been closed until further notice.

\* The Gauteng Health Department has obtained another coronavirus-related court order – this time against a church in Katlehong. **The church has effectively been restrained from convening a service that is not in accordance with gazetted regulations.**

\* **Uganda has blocked entry to further arrivals over the next 30 days.**

\* **Algerian protesters on Friday called off their weekly anti-government demonstrations** for the first time in more than a year to reduce the spread of coronavirus. Imprisoned activist Karim Tabbou was among the protest leaders who urged demonstrators to suspend their marches.

\* Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa attended the investiture of his Namibian counterpart Hage Geingob in Windhoek on Saturday, defying his own government's ban on anyone leaving the country over the virus. **The trip took place a day after the first case of Covid-19 case was reported in Zimbabwe.** The first death was reported today.

\* **Geingob has declared a state of emergency in Namibia** which has so far confirmed two cases of the virus.

\* **Congolese music star Aurlus Mabélé has died in hospital in Paris from the coronavirus.** He was 67. The so-called 'king of soukous (a high-tempo Congolese dance music) has sold 10m albums.

\* MultiChoice is rolling out Africa-wide public service announcements and making news channels more widely available to share credible information about Covid-19. MultiChoice Group CEO Calvo Mawela said **some news channels were now available for subscribers and non-subscribers on the DStv Now app.**

\* **Zambia's Parliament has been suspended indefinitely as part of measures to stop the spread of the virus.** The government has also closed down all educational institutions and more than 500 health care workers will be trained to treat the virus.

*There is a great deal of interest in the situation in SA where the infection rates are beginning to soar (402 this afternoon).* As President Cyril Ramaphosa prepares to address the nation tonight there is intense speculation that a national lockdown is on the cards. **Business Day** reports that the government, business, labour and other stakeholders are carefully scrutinising the legislation through which a full lockdown can take place. According to legal experts, **this could be done either through the Disaster Management Act** which is the most likely mechanism, or by imposing a state of emergency.

*The army could be deployed to patrol streets to delay the need for a countrywide lockdown in SA.* Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said the government would gradually impose stricter measures as the virus spreads before the worst

case of a national shutdown. Mkhize reportedly told the [Sunday Times](#) that **if current restrictions do not limit the virus' spread, the army will soon be patrolling the streets to enforce them.** If that does not work, the government will look at area-specific lockdowns to contain epicentres of the virus. And if still unsuccessful, a national lockdown will be the last resort before a state of emergency. However, senior military officials reportedly told the [Sunday Times](#) that the SANDF cannot afford a lockdown. The defence force, they said, has analysed its resources and found that it does not have sufficient personnel or equipment.

*Pretoria is also revoking 8 000 visas issued to Chinese citizens* as part of a travel ban aimed at countries with a high prevalence of the coronavirus. It has also revoked 425 visas granted to people from Iran, another high-risk country, says a [TimesLIVE](#) report. With more cases reported than any other country in sub-Saharan Africa, SA is barring entry to foreign travellers coming from or transiting through high-risk countries including **Italy, Iran, South Korea, Spain, Germany, France, Switzerland, the US, the UK and China.**

*And SA's Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng has implemented tighter restrictions on courts.* According to the directive published on Friday, only people with a material interest in a case – such as litigants, accused, witnesses and those who may be needed to provide support, such as those accompanying children, victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse, the elderly and people with disabilities – will be permitted to enter courts. Family members, representatives of special interest or support groups and journalists will also be allowed, notes a [TimesLIVE](#) report. **The directive says non-essential visitors will only be allowed into the court precinct with the permission of the head of court.** Audio-visual remand centres in correctional centres linked to Magistrates' Courts will be used for postponing cases where the accused is in custody. Witnesses who are in foreign countries will not be summonsed to attend a trial in the SA.

*Judges in north-western Tanzania have been told to avoid issuing jail sentences 'at all costs' in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus.* Justice S.M. Rumanyika also instructed them to grant bail to all offenders who qualified. A report on the [Business Ghana](#) site notes that these were among eight guidelines he issued in a letter to several district courts to help stop the spread of the virus in prisons. Others included limiting access to lawyers or visitors. 'You will notice these guidelines contradict common practice and maybe to some extent the law. But know that other people's lives and our own are more important,' he said. **The country has five confirmed cases of Covid-19.**