



The South Sudan Civil Society Forum

Civil Society Forum Commends efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic but calls for additional measures in South Sudan

(Juba, April 8, 2020) The South Sudan Civil Society Forum (SSCSF) commends the High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19 and international partners on their efforts to fight the pandemic in the country through its regular meetings, guidelines and regular public information on the situation. While the work of the HLTC-19 demonstrates national commitment of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (RTGoNU) to fight this pandemic, SSCSF notes with concern the following multiple gaps in the overall response to this disease:

1. The HLTC-19 is made up mainly of politicians. Involvement of civic groups – civil society, women, youth, religious leaders, academia, professional associations and business community would help provide additional expertise, enhance public health education and combat stereotypes and hate speeches. SSCSF calls on the leadership of the HLTC-19 to coopt civic groups to the membership of the HLTC-19.
2. HLTC-19 is largely Juba-based and has no well-resourced and functional state-level equivalents to implement decisions of the HLTC-19 at subnational levels. For example, reports from the borders indicate that officials had no resources to correctly quarantine people crossing the borders, especially by illegal means. Delayed formation of state and county governments further exacerbate absence of political leadership to mobilize and lead state and local government efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. For effective and coordinated response to this pandemic, SSCSF recommends immediate establishment of subnational technical committees on COVID-19 headed by state governors and county commissioners.
3. Expressions of hatred and hate speeches against humanitarian workers has increased since the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in the country. Local sources confirmed to SSCSF, reports of assault on humanitarian workers in Yambio town on Monday, April 5, 2020, on accusation that they were sources of the disease in the country. SSCSF calls on all South Sudanese to desist from hatred relating to the spread of the disease and encourages public authorities including commands of organized forces at all levels to provide protection to humanitarian workers all over the country.
4. Traffic police officers and security personnel at curfew checkpoints in Juba City have increased their activities on the roads where they stop drivers, bending over to talk to them at close distance of about half a meter, through car windows and fondling their car logbooks and driving licenses without using sanitizers or washing their hands – actions that increase risks of contracting and transmitting the disease for the drivers, the traffic police officers and security personnel at curfew checkpoints. For the safety of drivers, traffic police officers and other security personnel, SSCSF recommends a suspension of checking driving licenses and logbooks or provide sanitizers to that effect until the emergency created by COVID-19 is officially eased by the national government.
5. Our members have observed that members of the Taskforce and Ministry of Health do not strictly adhere to personal distancing guidelines, especially during press conferences. This sends negative image and undermines the campaign on personal distancing. To be truly exemplary, SSCSF calls on members of the HLTC-19 to strictly observe personal distancing especially when they address the press.
6. SSCSF calls on the RTGoNU to increase the national annual budget allocated to the health sector and to urgently develop the sector so that it is able to adequately and efficiently respond to health needs of the citizens in the country especially at times of global emergencies and lockdown such as this created by COVID-19.
7. SSCSF calls on the civil population to strictly adhere to health guidelines of the Ministry of Health and the HLTC-19 on this pandemic and respect the curfew time without provocation of the security personnel.

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