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Her Excellency
Ms Salome Zourabichvili
President of Georgia
Tbilisi
Géorgie

23 March 2020

Your Excellency,

I have the honour to write to you to thank you for all your efforts to limit the scale and impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, and to request your support in catalysing an urgently needed, extensive societal ‘movement’ to stop this disease as rapidly as possible.

Never before has the world been faced with an infectious respiratory disease like COVID-19 – a disease that is decimating communities and economies, and causing significant human suffering. Despite this, COVID-19 is a disease that can be stopped through the implementation of an effective response strategy. Preventing the spread of COVID-19 by limiting and then stopping chains of transmission is feasible and should remain the top priority for all countries – the faster and more comprehensive this action, the greater the possibility of ending this outbreak rapidly.

Your Excellency, we have held weekly briefings with the permanent missions in Geneva to update them on the COVID-19 pandemic and progress in the response. The COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan was launched to guide the global response based on the situation in countries. I am encouraged by the reports I have received from many countries, which show how they are moving forward in tackling the virus and mitigating its impact.

To date, certain countries have not seen any cases of COVID-19, some countries have identified sporadic infections or limited clusters, while others have documented community transmission. In writing this letter, I would like to summarize a series of fundamental actions that require your leadership, and that are needed if the world is to overcome this global health crisis that will mark our generation – irrespective of the stage of the outbreak in your country.

cc: The Minister, Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories,
Labour, Health and Social Affairs, Tbilisi
Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations Office and other International
Organizations at Geneva

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Your political leadership is indispensable, and can be leveraged through a coordinated, capacitated and operationalized response strategy, including:

- activating relevant emergency protocols and shoring up emergency response financing to ensure readiness and strong coordination among response entities;
- establishing a national COVID-19 emergency management office linked to provincial/state mechanisms, in order to facilitate national and international response management;
- enabling whole-of-government coordination mechanisms – including health, transport, travel, trade, finance, security and other relevant sectors – in order to leverage existing assets and re-orient resources, roles and responsibilities in step with the evolution of the outbreak;
- stopping public gatherings, both to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread and, just as importantly, to facilitate the response;
- repurposing key government assets and ministries to implement the national strategy of testing, isolation and quarantine verification;
- putting in place a national contingency plan to guide provinces/states in adapting their operations in an orderly manner, if and when the situation they are handling moves from sporadic cases to clusters of cases, and then on to community-wide transmission; and
- equipping local public health authorities and first-line responders with adequate resources and ensuring their ability to scale the response as the situation evolves – such resources include requisite diagnostic capacity, medical supplies such as personal protective equipment (PPE), and adequate surge capacity for patient care.

Your Excellency, your personal engagement is needed to mobilize communities and catalyze a societal movement to combat COVID-19. Amplifying your voice and presence through prominent multimedia channels, and equipping your citizenry with evidence-based guidance and a clear understanding of the action needed by means of regular addresses to the nation, will prove invaluable. You may also wish to consider:

- engaging all segments of society – including leaders from subnational authorities, religious groups, societal organizations, professional bodies, the media, schools, universities and beyond, and figures from the worlds of sport and entertainment – and encouraging national, subnational and local administrations to engage with all these stakeholders in ways that leave no-one behind;
- making crystal clear the severity of this disease for your population, as this is fundamental to their full engagement: the threat is at least of greater magnitude than that posed by seasonal flu and the disease can strike all age groups;

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- ensuring that your population understands that the success of COVID-19 control is totally dependent on speed, and that the population itself must be the country's rapid surveillance system for fever and dry cough;
- helping the citizenry to appreciate the importance of hand hygiene, cough etiquette and social distancing, and enabling them to understand why society-wide measures – such as reducing gatherings or curtailing movement – sometimes have to be introduced;
- eliminating all financial and other barriers that can impede the isolation and swift testing of all suspect cases; and
- establishing contingency plans and providing economic relief for those sub-populations disproportionately affected by the outbreak (e.g. the elderly, gig economy workers and low-income earners) to ensure that response efforts are not hindered by a disenfranchised citizenry.

The World Health Organization (WHO) stands ready to support you and your Government should you face any difficulties in advancing these key response priorities. Please do not hesitate to let me know what WHO can do to support your Government.

Finally, Your Excellency, your role in fostering solidarity between nations is critical to the success of national and international responses. As the virus is not constrained by geographies or politics, decisions in any one country have the potential to impact response efforts across the globe. Thus, the politicization of the outbreak, or complacency in a nation's response, can constitute insurmountable impediments to overcoming this virus – both nationally and globally.

The sharing of capacities, lessons learned, good practices, information, tools, science and data will be essential in tackling this outbreak, to the same degree as the compassion shown by global leaders in viewing and treating humanity inclusively. In the face of this scourge, the international community must stand together and must mount a unified counter-attack. Concrete actions you may wish to consider towards this common objective include:

- rapidly sharing information on cases and major control measures with WHO in order to inform the international risk management and knowledge-sharing effort;
- minimizing international restrictions on travel and trade in order to facilitate the global response and minimize economic impact;
- generating the best possible tools by participating in prioritized, standardized WHO-coordinated multi-country trials for therapeutics and vaccines; and
- maintaining a commitment to reduce COVID-19 transmission nationally, recognizing that in our interconnected world and economies, the actions against COVID-19 in each country affect all others.

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Once again, thank you, Your Excellency, for your resolve and for your commitment to stopping the spread of COVID-19. Indeed, this challenge warrants a global effort, and WHO stands ready to continue supporting the international community in addressing this global public health emergency.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.



Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
Director-General