

**OFFICE OF THE PRIME  
MINISTER AND CABINET**



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SOLOMON ISLANDS**

## **SPECIAL ADDRESS TO THE NATION**

**BY PRIME MINISTER HON MANASSEH D SOGAVARE**

**Sunday 13 September 2020**

Fellow Solomon Islanders, who are listening in throughout our country and abroad. Good afternoon and a blessed Sunday to you all.

Today I am obliged to update you all on the status of our students in Philippines.

As you all know the Government has planned 3 repatriation flights for our students studying in Philippines to be taken on 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of September, and 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2020.

You are also aware that we have classified Philippines as an extremely high-risk country for Covid-19. This means, each student must have 3 consecutive negative Covid-19 tests in the 14 days before the flight date before they can board their flight home.

We have a total of 373 students and 12 off-springs below 2 years old in the Philippines - a total of 385 people altogether. With 3 tests per person, this translates to 1,155 tests.

The government has been extremely fortunate that the Philippines Red Cross had agreed to coordinate and do all the 1,155 tests.

They scheduled the first of the three tests for the first group to fly on 27<sup>th</sup> September last Friday, 11<sup>th</sup> September 2020. A total of 130 students were tested.

The first test of the second group to fly on 29<sup>th</sup> September is scheduled for today, Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2020. The first test of the third group to fly on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2020 will be scheduled closer to the date.

Good citizens of Solomon Islands the oversight Committee has received the results of the 1<sup>st</sup> tests from the first group of students yesterday afternoon.

Based on these results and the advise from the Oversight Committee, I am here today with my Minister of Health and Medical Services, and my Minister of Education and Human Resources Development to inform you all that 6 of the 130 students that were tested on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> September had tested positive to Covid-19.

The Oversight Committee convened an emergency meeting yesterday afternoon and late into the night to discuss the implications and actions to respond to this new development. These students have been informed of their results by the Philippine Red Cross in accordance with the Laws of Philippines.

Last night a subgroup of the Oversight Committee comprising the Ministry of Health and Medical Service and the Ministry of Education and Human Resources managed to establish contact with the six students. This was an important undertaking before we speak with their parents.

As mentioned above, based on Philippines' Laws, all 130 students have been informed of their first test results. The Philippines' Law now requires that all students who test positive, and their contacts to be quarantined at home, unless they are sick from the virus in which case they are admitted to hospitals. The Philippines' Department of Health will undertake contact tracing for the 6 students with positive tests and contacts.

I am happy to confirm to the nation that the 6 students are asymptomatic. This simply means they are not sick with the virus infection at this stage. They will quarantine in their residences.

We have spoken with some parents. We will continue to our efforts to contact and speak with the other parents. Some students have already informed their parents.

It is important for the parents to know that their son or daughter are currently not showing signs of being sick with the infection, and that they are being cared for.

Fellow citizens, the repatriation flights will remain on schedule. These results only strengthen our resolve to bring our students home in accordance with our predeparture testing arrangements.

Our Ministry of Health and Medical Service is working closely with the Philippines Red Cross to establish a formal arrangement that extends to and includes the care of our students for which the government will meet the costs in the first instance.

Fellow Solomon Islanders, this is a challenging situation. We do not have a presence on the ground in the Philippines. We have been blessed with the willingness of the Philippines Red Cross to assist the government in caring for our students.

This arrangement was only possible through the support of our very own Solomon Islands Red Cross and the Regional Office of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescents in Fiji who

were instrumental in establishing this partnership for our government and our students.

I convey my government's sincere appreciation to the respective Red Cross Societies in the Philippines, Fiji, and Solomon Islands for their tremendous support.

We have also reached out to the WHO office in Manila through our WHO office in Solomon Islands. WHO has also been supportive in their response to our requests.

Fellow citizens let me assure you that my government is monitoring the situation closely. We are taking all necessary steps to ensure the welfare of our students is looked after.

At the same time the Government has a responsibility to protect our country and people from this Covid-19.

This simply means only students that meet our '3-negative tests requirement' will board our repatriation flights. While this does not give a 100% guarantee we will not import Covid-19, it guarantees we minimize the risk of importation of Covid-19 into the country

We are confident that even those who have tested positive will recover to travel home on the 3<sup>rd</sup> flight scheduled for 24<sup>th</sup> October 2020.

Fellow Solomon Islanders be assured that your government is committed to bringing all our students home safely. We are also committed to ensure we do not unduly import the virus into the country.

However, if the virus does breach our borders despite our best efforts, we will pick it up at the border quarantine and eliminate at the quarantine station.

I re-emphasize it is easier to prevent and or manage the risk coming in through our international airports. It is our western border we must strengthen our vigilance on.

Fellow citizens let us join hands as a nation and pray for the speedy recovery of the six students.

It is possible that subsequent tests being today and others to follow may pick up some more positive cases of Covid-19. Let us pray that if this happens that they too will not show signs of illness and that they will recover speedily.

Fellow citizens, the repatriation flights will remain on schedule.

Some adjustments to dates might occur depending on advice from our health people. However, total cancellation is not an option. We must bring our students home safe, while keeping our country safe.

Once our students arrive, they will undergo mandatory quarantine under our laws and will only be released after 3 consecutive negative tests during the quarantine period.

My good people, despite 6 of our citizens testing positive in the Philippines, we must do all we can to ensure that as a country, Solomon Islands remain Covid-19 free. Some Covid-19 free countries are in similar situation with their citizens overseas infected.

Let us come together and pray for and support our students, their parents, and families, and also support each other. My prayers and those from my government are with all our students and their parents.

We look forward to seeing our students home soon

**Be assured, Solomon Islands is still COVID-19 Free**

**IUMI TUGEDA AGAINST COVID-19**

**May God Bless Solomon Islands from shore to shore.**