



SPECIAL NATIONWIDE ADDRESS

HON PRIME MINISTER MANASSEH SOGAVARE, MP

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Introduction

Fellow citizens, a very good afternoon to all of you.

I stand here today in solidarity with my Ministers for Health and Education to inform the nation that, we now have our first confirmed case of COVID-19. The person is a student that came on the repatriation flight from Philippines. It pains me to say that we have lost our COVID19 free status despite our collective efforts to prevent the pandemic from entering our country.

This is a disappointing setback to the extraordinary efforts of all officials, personnel and community stakeholders who have been actively involved in working to prevent COVID-19 from entering Solomon Islands. Despite the unfortunate situation which our country is now experiencing, I would like to assure the public that the preparedness and response measures the government has

diligently worked on implementing over the past eight months, have been activated and are now in full operation.

The planning, preparation, simulations and exercises have not been in vain and the government is confident of its capacity to respond, contain and manage the situation to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of the public is maintained.

Updates

Fellow Solomon Islanders, this student was quarantined in Manila before he boarded the flight to come back home. He tested negative for the three tests that were done in Manila, which was a compulsory requirement that each student must meet before they were allowed to board the aircraft.

Our post arrival testing protocol, requires all arrivals to be tested within 48 hours of arrival.

The student was picked up during this first test run. A further specimen has been collected for confirmation. That result will be available later today. The student is not sick with the infection. Let us be thankful that the testing picked up the imported positive cases. That is assurance and indication that in-country test capability is reliable.

Two other students that have been in contact with this student have also been tested. Their results were inconclusive. They too

have been re-tested and their results will also be available later this afternoon. We will update when their results are available.

The COVID-19 positive student and the two contacts have now been isolated at the NRH Isolation facility. Decisions on their long-term isolation and quarantine will be assessed by the Oversight Committee.

Fellow citizens, while we have been working to prevent the virus from breaching our shores, it is now with us. However, in all my messages to you I have always said that if in the event the virus does enter our country, we are ready to identify it, which we have done; to isolate it, which we have done; to contain it, which we are doing, and to eliminate it, which we are also focusing our efforts on achieving.

All protocols and Standing Operating Procedures have been activated. Risk assessment in the Quarantine Stations have been done by the surveillance team. Case investigation has commenced and is in progress as I speak. Contact tracing is in operation. This process includes informing our representatives in Manila to ensure that persons who came into contact with the infected student in Manila are also informed and necessary precautions put in place.

Risk assessment is now being carried out for all front line staff that were working on the night the flight arrived from the Philippines. Based on the outcome of this assessment, frontline staff who came

into contact with the affected students will also be quarantined and tested.

Fellow citizens, my government is well aware of the risks posed by repatriating our students from the Philippines. We are also aware that keeping our children in the Philippines exposes them to even higher risks. As a responsible government we cannot close our eyes to the plight of our children and bringing them home was the humane thing to do.

When Philippines started partially reopening its international borders in August this year, my government negotiated to bring our children home. Pre-departure protocols were agreed to for Manila. Post arrival protocols were also agreed to in Honiara.

We are prepared for this eventuality. We stand with our students remaining in the Philippines and those in quarantine and also with their parents.

The Government has activated the various elements, protocols and standard operating procedures of its preparedness plans. All the planning and simulations that we did over past months are now operational.

Fellow citizens, I have confidence in our professionals. They will rise to the occasion and safeguard our country.

There will be no general 'Lock down' because the Government has faith in our systems and the professionals responsible for managing them. If any lockdown is required the public will be advised in advance.

The quarantine stations are no-go-zones. The isolation facility at the NHR is also a no-go-zone. The NRH itself will continue operating its normal business until further notice.

I ask all relatives not to go and visit the quarantine stations until further notice. The key message is please do not go to the vicinities of the quarantine stations that our students are in.

Fellow citizens, I am confident that we will contain and manage the situation with minimal disruption to our daily lives. The confirmed case was detected in a controlled environment. This makes it easier for us to manage and contain it.

Fellow citizens, this is the time that we must come together as one people. The only way forward is to stand united by supporting our students and each other. Rest assured the Government will continue to ensure the safety and well-being of our population and we would like to remind the public to remain calm and stay alert for official updates. We are all in this together.

To our students still in Philippines and those in Quarantine Stations in the Honiara, be strong, obey instructions that have been imparted to you. Your government will never abandon you.

It is doing everything it can to ensure that you remain safe and we also ask that the rules and requirements are respected and obeyed not just for your own sake but for the sake of your families and the nation as a whole.

Fellow citizens, as a result of this current situation, we are suspending and reviewing the schedule of repatriation flights to ensure we are in full control of our domestic situation before allowing any further repatriation flights to continue.

Good people of Solomon Islands, I ask that we all pray for our students and their families. I ask that we pray for the student that is positive and the contacts that are still being tested. I pray that our Father in Heaven will give us the strength and courage to stand tall in the face of this adversity.

I commend the work of our frontline workers you are our first and last line of defence. Strict adherence to security protocols by our professionals is a must. Any breach of safety protocols on your part will have a repercussion on the rest of the population.

I also call on the fellow professionals in the health sector, our doctors, our nurses, our allied health professionals you are trained for situation such as this. Stand tall for our country. Stand tall for your families and your people. You are bound by your own professional and ethical standards for the service of our people.

Conclusion

Fellow citizens, the Government will continue to monitor the situation closely and provide timely information and advice to our people.

I request that all our media platforms and outlets respect the rights and privacy of our students. Please only report facts.

I encourage all of us to continue to pray for God's guidance and protection over our country and our people. Please remain calm as there is no need to panic. The Government has this under control.

Let me close with a quotes from the Book of Prophet Isaiah as follows:

Isaiah 41:10, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Fellow Solomon Islanders,

Let us come together to support our students here and those remaining in the Philippines.

We are one people, We are one nation, We are Solomon Islands.

To God be the Glory, Great things He has done.

IUMI TUGEDA AGAINST COVID-19.

May God Bless Our Beloved Solomon Islands from shore to shore.