



26th January, 2021

**STATEMENT
THE COVID-19 SITUATION: TIME TO ACT!!!!**

Like most Ghanaians, SFG believes that Ghana is currently losing the war against Covid-19 and we must act swiftly to turn things around. We are in a crisis and must respond accordingly.

This crisis reflects a failure of societal leadership. Our situation was predictable and predicted 9 months ago when we first lifted the first lockdown. Since then, our political, traditional, corporate, and religious leaders, and our social elite have knowingly put their various parochial interests above the interests of society and have behaved atrociously. We did not use the opportunity of the low infection rates of mid-2020 to plan for more challenging times. We simply dropped our guard.

The second half of 2020 was characterized by irresponsible electioneering, with political party leaders crisscrossing the country inducing people to congregate in super-spreader events to promote their respective bids for a leadership they were palpably not showing. This was followed by equally irresponsible Christmas and New Year celebrations - church services, nightclubbing, society-weddings, and other “Society” partying – even as stories of a mounting death-toll were seeping out of our hospitals into the public domain illustrated by several high-profile deaths. Despite this awareness, 2021 begun with the terrible example set by our Parliamentarians in the early hours of 7 January then the thoughtless partying of the victorious political elite. And now in the last week of January with all our ICUs and mortuaries over-run and with the highest infection and mortality rates ever, the State continues to look on while super spreader events are organised with reckless abandon.

What is completely baffling however is that in his first “fellow Ghanaians” speech our newly reinstated President, fresh from his super-spreader celebrations, and aware that the virus has mutated in ways that make it much more infectious and lethal - especially for children has reopened all schools including primary schools exposing our children, and thus young mothers to this deadly disease and offered only lukewarm admonitions regarding public behaviour.

We have much to learn about the behaviour of COVID-19. However, we know a great deal about how to control the spread of viruses. We cannot continue to disregard the pleas and warnings from the scientific and medical community regarding the dangers our current behaviour holds for society. Ghana must immediately prioritise several measures as follows:



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Information provision. To focus attention, build trust, and build commitment the State must begin to provide more regular, more transparent, more accurate and more credible information about the virus and the disease - how to avoid infection; what to do if infected; what to expect post-infection etc. We commend the “Fellow Ghanaians” series. However, we need much more information in different languages and different formats to reach and socialise more people. Broad consultation on how best to meet our information needs would go a long way to building confidence in the system.

Physical Distancing. As President Akufo-Addo famously said, “**The virus only moves when we move**”. We must drastically limit the physical interaction that spreads the virus. We must evaluate and implement a programme of measures designed to limit physical interaction including:

- a. full lock-downs of “hot-spot” communities and districts (such as Accra);
- b. bans on both religious and secular gatherings of more than certain (scientifically-determined) numbers of peoples;
- c. closure of all schools and universities;
- d. restrictions on the numbers of people in vehicles:

We must avoid the disastrous mistakes that led to the failure of the March 2020 lockdown. Strangely, almost a year later the Government has not published its evaluation of the lockdown to enable collective reflection and preparation for the future. The 2020 lockdown exposed the actual collapse of our political and governance systems. We were unable to manage water, food and medical/hygiene products supplies especially to the most vulnerable without stampeding that increased exposure to the virus. We failed because we have abandoned social mobilisation as the fundamental approach to solving our problems in the historically erroneous belief that unguided markets and charity will fill the gap. If COVID-19 has taught the world anything it is that societies that depend wholly on markets rather than public mobilisation have uniformly failed to control the disease. It is the countries where the public sector leads scientifically and allocates specific roles to the markets that have been most successful in protecting their people. It is time to learn some lessons.

Testing

No scientific response to the pandemic is possible without more effective data gathering and management. And only an effective testing regime will give the public confidence in the information that the State provides to citizens. This is a state responsibility. We need:

- a. free voluntary testing;
- b. compulsory, random testing in communities, schools, and other institutions;



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- c. compulsory contact tracing from all infected persons.

Enhanced Clinical Capacity and Protection of Frontline Workers

It is too late to prevent a wave of infections. No matter what we do at this stage things will get worse before they get better. We need to get ready to deal with more infected people. This means an upgrade medical infrastructure and capacity and critically better provisions for our frontline workers. We must as a matter of urgency provide PPEs, specific training, better protocols, improved logistics etc. It is unacceptable that almost a year after the WHO declared a pandemic, we do not have the basic equipment in place to keep our heroes physically and psychologically safe while they look after our loved ones. Last year, before government de-emphasised the pandemic to focus on electioneering, we saw hospital building initiatives, sanitiser manufacturing initiatives, ventilator design initiatives. What has happened to these initiatives?

Vaccinations

Science has delivered vaccines that can control COVID-19 infection rates to levels that would protect our national health system. Government must, as a matter of urgency, tell the public what specific arrangements are in place to acquire, distribute, and monitor its vaccination programme. Which of the many vaccines now available are we pursuing and why? What is the cost? What is the schedule for delivery? What infrastructure is being put in place to deliver vaccines across the country equitably? What education programme is being rolled out by who?

SFG calls upon the Akufo-Addo administration to urgently address the public calls for a more effective response to the pandemic. Lives are being lost needlessly. But it is not too late to protect our civilisation.

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