



NETWORK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN GHANA (NETRIGHT)

(Mobilizing for Women's Rights in Ghana)

NETWORK FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN GHANA (NETRIGHT), WOMEN'S MANIFESTO COALITION (WMC) AND THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE COALITION (DVC)

PRESS STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS IN GHANA CALL FOR A GENDER RESPONSIVE RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Ghana's situation on the Coronavirus outbreak appears to be worsening. Official records indicate 52 cases as at today with two (2) deaths, Tuesday, 24th March 2020. So far there have been three (3) advisories issued by the President, H. E Nana Akufo-Addo outlining measures to address contain the pandemic.

The 3-Coalitions, namely, the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), the Women Manifesto Coalition (WMC) and the Domestic Violence Coalition (DVC), support the presidential directives announced so far including ban on mass gatherings such as funerals, religious services, political rallies, closing down schools and universities as well as the closure of Ghana's borders. We also salute the many Ghanaians that have complied with the directives and urge the citizens to continue complying with the emergency measures and others that might become necessary as the full scale of the pandemic unfolds for the nation.

The 3-Coalitions also wish to highly commend women whose caring responsibilities have increased owing to the closing down of schools, day-care facilities and general increase of time spent by members in households.

The COVID-19 pandemic is predicted to cause major havoc in economies with very few social safety nets. Many citizens especially the self-employed are worried about the impact of the pandemic on their livelihoods. There is a lot of anxiety and uncertainty and poor information on measures such as social distancing, handwashing in public places and their importance.

The Ghana Health Service and the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research have warned that the recorded cases of infected persons are bound to increase. Already a number of reported cases in the country have **no external travel history**, indicating that community transmission cannot be ruled out. This new development suggests that no acts of defiance of the presidential directives even by state agencies must be tolerated. Failure on the part of public institutions to strictly adhere to presidential directives will encourage others to do same, possibly pushing enthusiastic citizens to take the law into their own hands to enforce compliance - such situations must be avoided at all cost.

An additional concern is the lack of clarity on constitutional decisions justifying the passage of the Imposition of Restriction Bill 2020 due to its potential to breed unnecessary constitutional challenges, and possible arbitrariness. Again, the Law grants unnecessary powers to the

president; given the legal opinions that there are adequate legal provisions to deal with the matters to be addressed by the Law.

The Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), the Women Manifesto Coalition (WMC) and the Domestic Violence Coalition (DVC), are aware that epidemics, such as the COVID-19, affect girls, women, boys and men differently and that they magnify existing inequalities, including on age, class, disability, gender and income lines. Given this, and in line with our mandate to promote women's rights and gender equality in Ghana we demand as a matter of urgency and in the interest of Ghana as follows:

1. **Develop and publicise a Comprehensive Strategic Plan on COVID19:** The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development should lead a process of combined state institutional effort on measures and modalities to engage citizens on how the pandemic is being addressed. The plan must provide key elements of the framework for the measures and interrelated interventions including the provision of services such as water, testing, security, and support systems for frontline health workers and identify their gender aspects.
2. **Public Gatherings and Voter Registration:** Stop the Electoral Commission (EC) from proceeding with its intended plan of the voter registration exercise as the activity would involve public gatherings.
3. **Domestication and Adaptation on COVID19 Issues:** Require public health and public education authorities to domesticate and adapt advisories on issues such as social distancing and self-quarantines taking into account the largely informal nature of our economy, the predominance of self-employment, communal living conditions, the use of public toilets and ablution facilities, public transportation and the nature of our markets.
4. **Response to COVID19 must be in line with human rights:** While the pandemic poses threats to all citizens of Ghana, the 3 Coalitions, namely NETRIGHT, WMC and the DV Coalition, call on the government to ensure that all measures are in line with Ghana's 1992 Constitution which guarantees the Human Rights of all individuals found within the territorial boundaries of the Republic of Ghana. Chapter 5 of the 1992 Constitution titled, "Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms" provides for rights such as right to life, economic rights and the rights of women and in the wake of the pandemic, we must ensure that all measures guarantee and safeguard those rights.
5. **Provision of effective and dignified healthcare:** We know that persons with certain conditions and the elderly are most likely to suffer from the virus. Indeed, women, men, boys and girls in Ghana, particularly those who experience poverty, reside in deprived urban and rural communities, and live with disabilities, are already facing some challenges in accessing effective and efficient healthcare. We therefore call on the government to expand access for those currently marginalised from healthcare and the most vulnerable to the virus; ensure isolation centres are clean, with functional toilets and regular electricity and water supply; ensure that measures are in compliance with policies and

laws to protect vulnerable groups such as: The Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715), the Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732) and the Mental Health, 2012 (Act 846). There must also be guidance on public health measures including towards ensuring that health workers are compassionate in relating to patients. In this connection, the immediate release of funds for these actions to be effective is called for.

6. **Continued expansion of health care and social services:** While COVID-19 is a serious threat to public health, other critical healthcare needs continue and risk not being met. For example, in Liberia, more women died of obstetric complications than Ebola itself during the outbreak. This should be avoided in Ghana in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. NETRIGHT, WMC and the DV Coalition therefore call on the government to ensure that COVID-19 does not lead to diversion of resources away from other areas, such as efforts to reduce maternal and child mortality or child immunisation.
7. **Measures aimed at ensuring economic stability that take a gendered analysis:** The government's response should recognize that women will constitute the majority of primary care givers for family members as well as in professional capacities as health-workers and social workers. At the same time, they will face increased burden to provide for the family, particularly if family members fall ill or lose jobs while undergoing economic hardship linked to the pandemic. We therefore call on the government to take steps to stabilize prices and counter inflation in the face of potential panic-buying; assist health and social care workers with childcare; while ensuring that both women and men receive on an equal basis, some protection from the economic impacts of the pandemic.
8. **Address Issues of gender-based violence (GBV) and respect the human rights of women and girls:** Already, COVID-19 and the measures taken to curtail it are leading to higher GBV levels globally. In China, reports say that domestic violence has tripled in the wake of the pandemic. In Ghana, the possibility of the outbreak adding to the already dire situation of access to food, water and shelter for poorer and vulnerable women, could increase the incidence of sexual exploitation and abuse. NETRIGHT, WMC and the DV Coalition, therefore call on the government to increase the levels of public information campaigns to raise awareness of risks, how to report and what can be done to prevent GBV; train first responders on how to handle disclosures of GBV linked to the pandemic and provide extra funding and other resources for shelters and other service provision.
9. **The participation and meaningful representation of women in all decision making processes to address the COVID-19 outbreak:** In the wake of the corona virus pandemic, the ongoing process towards ensuring equal participation and sharing of responsibility among women and men should form a core feature of policy engagement and policy-making at all levels. Allowing for equal representation of women and men in the decision-making processes of COVID-19, will highlight the diversity of the decision making bodies such as the district assemblies and civil society groups. It will also demonstrate the government's commitment to providing for all citizens of Ghana, in their similarities and differences, and as evidence of its pursuit of true democratic principles.

Finally, the 3 Coalitions, namely NETRIGHT, WMC and the DV Coalition, appeal to all citizens, women, men, boys and girls, to exercise high levels of hygiene at this time and comply with public health measures. On our part, we will continue to monitor the situation as it develops and ensure that all policies related to addressing the pandemic are gender responsive and democratic.

Issued this day, 24th March, 2020 in Accra by the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), Women's Manifesto Coalition and the DV Coalition.

