JCTR PRESS STATEMENT ON MAKING WEARING OF MASKS MANDATORY

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More needs to be done to Support Poor Households with Masks

Much as the move to make wearing of surgical masks mandatory is a welcome development, the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) is of the view that there is need for more sensitisation on this matter. The Presidential announcement was made through the media and it would be wrong to assume that the message got across to all members of the public because some households might not have access to radio, TV or newspapers, let alone social media.

It is important to ensure that we tackle COVID-19 from all angles and the wearing of masks is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of the virus. However, the poor and vulnerable in some of our communities do not yet understand the need and the importance of wearing masks. Some people may have masks but they don’t know how to wear them properly. For instance, there are a lot of people who wear masks under the cheek leaving their mouths and noses unprotected. Then there are those who are frequently touching their masks thereby compromising the protection these masks are supposed to provide.

There is need for proper sensitisation in our communities especially in the compounds about the dangers of not protecting oneself from COVID-19 and the need for proper use of masks and other protective measures. JCTR acknowledges and applauds Government for the sensitisation being done through public address in some townships in Lusaka. However, we encourage more well-wishers to come on board to join in the sensitisation campaign around the country.

It is also important to note that some families cannot afford to buy masks for each family member. Even if some cloth masks being sold in the compounds are costing as little as K2.00, some households cannot afford them making it difficult for them to go to markets and other public places without the masks. This is forcing some families to share one available mask in the house thereby putting their lives at risk.

JCTR, welcomes the idea of encouraging home-made masks. However, the specifications of what type of material to use are not yet clear and this is an issue that also needs to be addressed. The Medical for Quality Health Care in Zambia says there is no material that has been approved by the World Health Organisation (WHO) to be used as alternative masks to the surgical ones. Some guidance is needed on what materials should be used by tailors in the communities to come up with masks that will be able to protect people from the virus.

Further, JCTR is of the view that the many donations of masks and other prevention equipment made to the Ministry of Health almost on a daily basis should also be targeted to poor households as we
continue to ensure protection of our hard working medical personnel. Industry must be encouraged to come forward to donate more masks so that at every public place, such as markets and bus stations, must have masks that can be distributed freely. Those who can afford to buy masks must continue to do so while those from poor and vulnerable households both in rural and urban areas should be provided with free masks. This will go a long way in our collective effort to prevent further spreading of the virus.

Note: Attribute statement to The JCTR Deputy Director, Father Alex Muyebe SJ.

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