



Monday, 21 June 2021

Dear Fellow South African,

We are now in the midst of a third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. We may be tired of this persistent enemy, but it is not yet tired of us. The threat to health and lives is evident as people become ill and some die. So we must do what we can, as individuals, as families and communities, as unions and employers, and as government, to limit the toll.

When the virus surges to this extent, the economy also faces challenges. Workers have to isolate or quarantine, people stop going out for recreation or shopping, tourism comes to a standstill, and workplaces have to spend more money to prevent infections.

It is incorrect to speak about a trade-off between lives and livelihoods. Rather, we need to invest our time, effort and resources to control the pandemic to see a payoff, in terms of both falling case numbers, reduced deaths and economic recovery.

The climb in new cases has been extraordinarily rapid and steep over the past few weeks. The number of daily new cases jumped from below 800 in early April to over 13,000 in the past week. In other words, it increased more than fifteen-fold from the last low point.

By now, we all know what we have to do to bring the rate of infection down, and we must act with great discipline to protect our people and our livelihoods.

Once again, we have to avoid social gatherings of all kinds, whether for family, friends, business or recreation. We must work from home if we can. We must wear masks when other people are around and stay one and half metre from other people whenever possible. Although we find ourselves in the middle of winter, we need to ensure good ventilation when indoors or in public transport, for instance by opening windows.

As South Africans, we have experienced pandemics before, most notably HIV/AIDS. We have managed to reduce new HIV infections by more than half since 2010. Our people know that we can control contagions, but it requires all of us to act together over time. It is not a task only for the vulnerable or the healthcare system. It requires every South African to do their part, to accept that we cannot go back to pre-pandemic days but must rather build a new normal that is safe for us all.

We can win this battle, but it will take persistence and discipline.

As always with COVID-19, there are huge differences between different parts of the country. Right now, Gauteng is by far the hardest hit. This week the number of new cases exceeded the peak in both previous waves, and it has not started to decline yet. As a result, hospitals are reaching capacity, and healthcare workers are exhausted.

Gauteng looks small on the map. But it is home to one in five South Africans and two-fifths of our economy. As an economic hub many people travel to and from this province. We need to turn this around urgently, or lives and livelihoods will be seriously under threat.

We plan to provide vaccinations for the vast majority of adults in South Africa by the end of the year. It is crucial that, when you become eligible, you get the jab as soon as possible. Our priority in this phase is to vaccinate all five million people over the age of 60. This week, we also plan to start vaccinating half a million educators and others in the sector since their work requires social contact and is vital for our children, our economy and our future.

All of us need to work to ensure a fast and smooth rollout of the vaccine campaign. If our family members, friends, neighbours or employees need help, we should support them in registering and getting to vaccine sites. We will only be able to effectively contain this disease when we succeed in rolling out vaccinations on a large scale.

Our country has experienced many hardships in the past. However, we overcame them by understanding the challenges we faced, developing appropriate strategies, and implementing them together. As we have done before, we need to work as one to prevent infections and reduce the effects of this virus on us.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril Ramaphosa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.