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In accordance with this guideline, the first phase of extensive random testing in various sections of Asmara was completed yesterday, June 2nd, 2020. The modalities of random sampling and testing were conducted jointly by the College of Medicine and Health Sciences and the National Laboratory.

The random sampling and testing carried out fulfilled the standard criterion in terms of size of representative sample, urban density, demographic composition, gender, and other determinant variables. The tests covered 4659 households, with one representative of the household undergoing the actual nasal and throat swab tests.

The final result of the tests is the following:

4658 of all tested individuals have been confirmed negative while one woman was diagnosed positive for COVID-19. Subsequently, all immediate and indirect contacts of the patient – 13 individuals in total - were promptly traced and put in quarantine in accordance with established norms and practices. One of those quarantined is her husband and he was later diagnosed positive for COVID-19.

The overall result of the extensive and random tests conducted is encouraging. It corroborates the validity of the timely and comprehensive preventive measures that the GOE has pursued from the outset.

Nonetheless, we must recognize that the fight against COVID-19 is still at its early phase. For the following reasons:

- Although the random tests carried out are extensive in scope, they have been limited to Asmara only. As indicated in our previous statement, these tests will be conducted in border towns and villages, as well as in other places, in the coming weeks. In the long term, the tests will be ramped up for much wider coverage.

- Although Flights to and from Eritrea have been stopped since the outbreak of COVID-19, travel to the country through land and sea routes continue unabated. As it happens, 5270 individuals were put in quarantine in 81 centers established throughout the country in the past months. 3477 of these were released subsequently after due processes while 1793 individuals still remain in quarantine in 45 centers. It is evident that this influx will continue even as necessary border control measures are taken.

- Globally, the spread of the pandemic continues to grow at an alarming rate. The rate of contagion is also growing daily in our region. For all these considerations, we cannot relax our vigilance. The fight against the pandemic must continue relentlessly and with the requisite vigour. And until the necessary comprehensive review and appraisal is finalized, the Guidelines in force for the last two months will be eased incrementally.

In conclusion, the High Level Task Force on COVID-19 urges all citizens to maintain the commendable commitment and adherence to the Guidelines that they have shown to-date in the fight against the pandemic in the period ahead, and to rectify, few breaches that have occurred intermittently; especially in market places and at social occasions – burials, mourning, weddings, and at places of worship. The High Level Task Force expresses its profound gratitude to all institutions who continue to work with full commitment to ensure success in the heavy task at hand and to all citizens who are extending financial and in kind contributions as well as other assistance to those in need in the fight to vanquish this pandemic.

High Level Task Force on COVID-19

Asmara

3 June 2020