



25th June 2021

Statement on National Lockdown

From the onset of the pandemic EMCOZ has been in support of measures put in place by the authorities to promote business continuity and contain the spread of infections in the community and workplaces and will continue to do so cautiously for the benefit of us all. We note with concern the increase in the number of new infections and the presence of the new wave in the country. We also notice that sectors worst affected by the pandemic initially were beginning to improve on their operations and as such localised lockdowns in hot spot areas will be fully supported. Notwithstanding the foregoing, our considered view is that a blanket national lockdown with tight restrictions on access to work places will reverse the gains in productivity that we had started witnessing in the economy.

A total lockdown may compound the problems that we were beginning to see being resolved as business sentiment was gradually becoming positive and bullish. During tight lockdowns the most likely place that those staying at home might get infected is in the retail outlets which will experience overcrowding as people jostle to access daily consumer goods. Contrary to sentiment expressed elsewhere reduced working hours in the retail sector make the retailing outlets more crowded since the same number of shoppers need to do their shopping during the reduced hours. This increases risk and therefore we would recommend extended trading hours but with strict observance of all recommended covid-19 protocols. This way we would, as a nation, be able to address the health concerns simultaneously with the requirement not to disrupt businesses. We recommend that businesses in areas not designated as hot spots should continue operating as is the case now. Any restrictions in working hours for manufacturers should take into account shift working arrangements which need not to be unnecessarily disrupted. Retail outlets, in our view, should operate from 8am to 5pm to reduce overcrowding. A review of curfew hours to run from 7pm to 5am to allow movement of those in essential services to travel from home to work and back ahead of curfew hours would minimise disruptions to production time. We also suggest that drivers entrusted with the responsibility of ferrying other employees should be exempted from curfew hours to facilitate their travelling from work to home.

We appeal for more transport to be made available to reduce overcrowding in public transport facilities and private transporters who demonstrate capacity to comply with all covid-19 protocols should be allowed to operate so as to reduce pressure on ZUPCO. We note with concern that there are sections of the population not complying with COVID-19 measures, and a case in point is the low compliance with the wearing of face masks especially in residential and rural areas and we therefore urge everyone to play their part in preventing the spread of the virus. It is therefore important that citizens strictly follow all protocols and cooperate with law enforcement agents enforcing lockdown regulations. We encourage the authorities to step up awareness campaigns in identified areas to contain the spread of the virus. We stand ready to engage the authorities and social partners in order to clarify any particular aspects of our proposal.

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