

Mauritania : Facing the pandemic of COVID-19

Mauritania moved quickly to address the health crisis once COVID-19 reared its head in the country. As soon as the first case appeared on Friday March 13, 2020 the Mauritanian authorities began to implement measures to respond as best as possible to the pandemic. As of May 25, 2020, the country had recorded 237 cases with 15 recoveries and 6 dead.

Measures of restriction

The coronavirus Task Force in Mauritania was established as an inter-ministerial committee under the leadership of the Prime Minister Ismail Bedda Cheikh Sidiya. The initial measures taken ranged from the closure of harbours and airports to the limitation of access points to the country and later to the closure of the country's borders with Mali, Senegal and Morocco. Then there were quarantine measures for anyone coming from a country where the pandemic was raging and the introduction of a curfew from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. as well as the closing of restaurants and cafes.

The government also announced a ban on all gatherings and the closure of schools. From March 27, the great Friday prayer was suspended and overland transport was restricted. Military patrols were also deployed along the border with Senegal.

To support these various measures, the Mauritanian government stepped up awareness and prevention actions coordinated by the Ministry of Health.

On April 1, the government secured the passage of a bill to apply Article 60 of the Mauritanian Constitution that allowed the government to assume emergency powers, for a limited time, to fight the pandemic. This decree gave the government the flexibility and required legal authority to consolidate the efforts undertaken since the appearance of the COVID-19 in the country.

Socio-economic incentives

The Head of State Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani announced the creation of a social solidarity fund endowed with 60 million US dollars from public resources and open to voluntary contributions to fight COVID-19 and its consequences. This fund was notably to be used for acquisition of medicines for poor families and to cover customs taxes for the rest of the year.

Significantly, the management of the crisis in Mauritania has been facilitated by recognizable support to the government by the private sector, particularly foreign companies in the country. An established collaborative framework led the Tasiast Company to equip an isolation center with 200 essential kits and make a house available to the government for the emergency isolation of detained travellers to

prevent the spread of the virus. The Tasiast company also pledged to donate 2million US dollars. Other companies such as "BP" donated 30 tonnes of medical instruments, hygiene products and masks as a contribution to the fight against COVID-19 through the NGO Pairs educators, their health partner.

For its part, the National Union of Mauritanian Employers announced on April 1 that they had collected nearly 111 million ouguiya (about 2,930,000 USD) as donations from companies such as Attijaribank in favour of the government to fight the pandemic.

Trade Union actions

For the time being, Mauritanian trade union organizations have been carrying out local actions at their base. The unions have held awareness-raising actions on health measures, namely hand washing, wearing of masks and social distancing. They have done this with innovative means such as sketches in local languages.

Conclusion

The effectiveness of the measures and the mobilization of private sector actors have been reinforced by an awareness campaign carried out in all the provinces of the country, associating local administration, elected officials and NGOs in order to inform and reassure citizens about the measures taken and urge them to respect the health instructions. For its part, the Ministry of Health has been communicating daily the number of confirmed cases, deaths, confined persons and reaches out through the Mauritanian Information Agency and different information platforms and social networks.