

# Swartbooi suggests smart lockdown plan

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Landless People Movement leader Bernadus Swartbooi has called for the resumption of National Assembly sessions, arguing that the work of the Legislature cannot stand idle, as this has a negative effect on the entire country and industries.

Swartbooi made the remarks during a media conference where he also called for a smart national Covid-19 lockdown strategy.

“Innovative methods must be employed on how parliament can resume and continue with the important legislative duties conferred by the constitution,” he said. He said the current crisis caused by Covid-19 has illuminated all the deficiencies of a “dysfunctional state” with an inadequate public health system.

According to him, the crisis has demonstrated that Namibia, as a country, needs a fundamental intervention to counter Covid-19, which will protect the vulnerable and middle-class during pandemics and natural disasters from further deprivation and financial calamity.

Furthermore, Swartbooi said he is aware that for the country to succeed in the fight

against coronavirus, additional resources will be required; however, it must be done in a fiscally sustainable manner.

“The Minister of Finance must provide current deficit and debt projections for this year after the N\$8.1 billion stimulus package,” he said.

Swartbooi called on treasury to postpone capital projects for the rest of the year and for the funds to be channelled to support the health initiatives and interventions as proposed by his party.

He also suggested the finance ministry solicit low costs funding at minimal interest rates from international institutions such as African Development Bank (AfDB) that can be repaid within a reasonable period without significantly expanding fiscal debt.

Moreover, Swartbooi says the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that the higher education institutions closures would impact over 90% of 1.5 billion of the world’s student population.

Thus, he said, Namibia has to quickly dash towards online learning as an avenue for exploration, so that schools and universities deploy online-learning on full scale in the medium to the long run to meet the global demands of the fourth industrial revolution.

“Telecommunication companies such as MTC, Paratus and Telecom will have to apply zero-rate policies (data free) to allow students to download the learning material,” he said.

Swartbooi also suggested churches in rural and peri-urban areas be temporary turned into information and schooling centres with internet facilities, where learners and teachers can access online learning and teaching.

“Each church can accommodate a number of students, but under strict health and safety regulations (social distancing). Mobile players like MTC and Telecom will have to boost connectivity so that these students access the learning material,” he said.

“Worst case scenario where access to internet is minimal and students are unable to access online learning, provision should be made for these students to put their studies on hold and continue when the virus has been contained without any prejudices.”

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Caption: Bernadus Swartbooi

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