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NEWS RELEASE

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Precautionary measures during COVID-19 lockdown in Namibia

The Namibia Informal Sector Organisation (NISO) has been working with the informal economy in Namibia as its constituency since Independence, and has decades of experience advocating for the informal economy in the country. By informal economy, we refer to the hawkers, informal traders, market traders, home-based businesses, subsistence farmers, and many other sectors earning a living outside of 'formal' employment; which according the Namibia Statistics Agency, represent almost half of those who are employed in the country today.

In these challenging times, when the whole world is affected by a new and deadly virus which has wreaked havoc on even the most developed and well-resourced countries, we stand ready to work collaboratively with the Government of the Republic of Namibia, municipalities, businesses, health professionals and regulators, other civil society actors, and all Namibians in keeping the highest levels of hygiene and safe practices, including social distancing. We are committed to ensuring that our members are responsible, and considerate towards the health and well-being of themselves and the public that they serve. Our confidence in our constituency's respect for the law and awareness of the need for good order in these trying times convinces us of the need to proactively engage with our government and the other sectors of society to protect business owners, their families, clients, and the Namibian public at large from the deadly coronavirus pandemic.

Many people living in lower income areas purchase their traditional food and goods from local outlets, such as cuca shops, street traders, and home-based businesses. These have been disrupted in this lockdown period, denying low-income residents cost-effective food sources which suit their family budgets, and at the same time denying income to the informal traders. These economic activities will be severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the national economic slowdown that is expected

In this light, traders need to be engaged and assisted to comply with sanitary precautions to avoid COVID-19 spread. Through the networks of the Namibia Informal Sector Organization (NISO) and in coordination with the National Alliance for Informal Settlement Upgrading and other key stakeholders in government, we are proposing a "training of trainers" strategy consisting of the following objectives:

All official correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary General
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1. To disseminate credible/official information about COVID-19 prevention and the implications for street/informal trade.

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2. To train informal economy traders in preventive sanitary measures and to clearly identify those who have undergone training for coordination with authorities.
3. To distribute sanitary material (masks, sanitizers, etc.) to protect traders and customers during lockdown.

This will be implemented through capacitating a network of volunteer trainers across all regions, in collaboration with local authorities, to identify training venues such as municipal markets and trading corridors that meet the required COVID - 19 requirements and precaution standards. Our proposal is to have the volunteer trainers trained by health professionals from the Ministry of Health, health inspectors from the municipalities, and other professionals who are involved in health and wellness. The informal economy committees will be trained and will continue mobilizing communities and supplying them with sanitary material for themselves and trainees. A network of trader leaders will be formed, through which sanitary material and printed information about COVID-19 prevention can be distributed in the weeks following the training.

We wish to demonstrate through this proposed strategy, which we have already submitted to the Ministry of Trade and Industrialisation, the Ministry of Health and Social Services, other government agencies, as well as various partners and stakeholders, that informal economy traders are aware of the circumstances we face as a society, and are serious about playing a constructive and responsible role in keeping Namibia safe, and minimising risks to the health and well-being of the public.

To this end, NISO is also proposing a code of conduct that will be simplified in bullet point form on a one-page document, and publicly displayed at various trading points, and which must be adhered to. The code should set strict preventative measures for the handling of goods or products. Preventive sanitary measures include:

- ensuring that cleaning services increase sanitization operations more regularly, especially after use of toilet facilities and infrastructure;
- operators of transportation services (taxis, buses, etc.), should be required to ensure personal hygiene, and to clean vehicles at least twice a day or directly after use (especially cleaning of door handles and interior sanitization);
- social distancing while queuing for services;
- prioritizing customers at higher risk (e.g. elders, pregnant women);
- reduce customers' touching of merchandise;
- cleaning of surfaces, installation of 'tippy taps', etc.

We are in communication with other stakeholders, and we will continue to proactively work with and receive advice from our partners and the authorities, as we strive to keep Namibians safe and work for our mutual benefit.

In light of that commitment, we request the Government to assist informal businesses by allowing them to resume their economic activities, within the requirements of optimal hygiene and the regulated social distancing, so that those in the informal economy, and their dependants, are spared the hardship that comes with loss of income during the lockdown currently being enforced. Our commitment is to continue to sensitize our constituents to trade responsibly, and to co-operate with

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the authorities in their legitimate efforts to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. We make a public appeal for an amendment to point 4.9 of the 'Guidelines and Regulations for 21-day Lockdown', which stipulate that:

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"All open markets, informal trading activities, shebeens, bars, pubs and nightclubs will not be permitted to operate during the lockdown period."

We give our assurance that we can and will develop strategies for open markets and informal trading activities to continue operating, while complying with health measures to combat COVID-19. We look forward to an empathetic response from the government and other stakeholders.

With regards

J.V. Kandenge (Mr)
Secretary-General

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