

14 April 2020

His Excellency, The President of South Africa

President C. Ramaphosa

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“cc” Chairperson of Parliamentary Portfolio Committee, Minister of Health and Minister of Trade and Industry

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Honourable President Ramaphosa,

Maintaining Ban on Alcohol Sales and Consideration of Relaxation of Trade for Selected Industries with Strict Controls

The **South African Muslim Network [SAMNET]**, the **Islamic Medical Association of South Africa [IMASA]**, the **Minara Chamber of Commerce** and the **Association of Muslim Accountants & Lawyers of South Africa [AMAL]** wish to express our support for the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Health, Dr Dhlomo, in his call for the President and the Command Council to reject the call of the alcohol industry to allow the selling of alcohol during the National State of Disaster.

We recognize that the industry, like all other non-essential industries, have been crippled by the lockdown and placed under severe strain. We also acknowledge that the lack of trade does have direct impact to state revenue in income tax and levies, and to employment. However, we believe that the call by the alcohol industry is irresponsible and not in the interest of the greater public. The ban on alcohol sales have been associated with a reduction in a number of crimes during the lockdown and confirms the Minister of Police's presentation to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Police in September 2019, showing a direct correlation between alcohol and drug consumption, particularly crimes committed during weekends.

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There is also substantial evidence of alcohol being a contributory factor in the instances of gender-based violence and assault of women including rape. At this time when there have been increased reports of domestic abuse during the lockdown in South Africa and internationally, we are certain that the availability of alcohol will aggravate this situation.

We need to consider that exposing children within homes to alcohol, if as the industry is proposing sales for off-site and at home consumption, is not conducive to their safety, education and socialization. It is also common cause that alcohol consumption is often associated as a social event and at a point in time when we need to ensure social distancing, any relaxation in the current prohibition will almost definitely result in parts of the community undertaking irresponsible behaviour and ignoring social distancing.

We understand that the South African constitution allows for the commercial production, sale and consumption of alcohol but we need to reinforce that that right must be balanced with the greater good to protect and save lives at a time of national disaster and crisis. The social and entertainment sector, to which alcohol as a product belongs, despite its considerable contribution to the fiscus, cannot be a priority. Furthermore, in a healthcare and medical crisis, we believe that a 5 week or longer dry spell has considerable social and health benefits, and that once we are past this national crisis, those who wish to exercise the right can be allowed to do so.

We sympathise with all industries, employees, and employers affected by the lockdown and the socio-economic and impacts that have resulted. But believe that there are more critical actions and issues to be addressed. The consequences of alcohol sales or any relaxation will extend much further and harder to enforce than to extend the current complete ban.

Consideration of Industries for Relaxation of Trade with Strict Controls

We believe that with the lockdown regulations there are many more critical and pressing sectors that need to be prioritized for relaxation. We recognise the challenge government faces in balancing the risk of spreading the virus against the need for critical services and economic activity. In consultation with the Chamber of Commerce we wish to highlight the following industries which offer valuable and constructive services needed at this time currently. We support a phased approach based on scientific and medical advice.

We recommend the following industries and businesses are considered for limited trading, with strict conditions:

- Basic DIY Hardware and construction materials, especially where emergency repairs and improvements need to be made.
- Educational material especially where it supports students learning from home under what is an extended lockdown like laptops, textbooks and school stationary.
- Clothing and textiles, especially as we approach the Winter season.
- Essential home and business Electrical and plumbing services, which are largely delivered independent of public interaction.

- Delivery only services for "White Goods" and appliances for those who have to replace or repair essential home appliances like fridges and freezers.
- Online and Delivery only businesses, where there is no physical interaction between the public consumer and suppliers.

Conditions for trade and supporting economic activity

By limiting businesses to delivery, we would allow small businesses to trade with limited risk to the public. This should be supported by a campaign for people to buy from local businesses and not only large online retailers. Furthermore, this can be linked to limiting the number of employees at business premises to ensure that only critical staff are traveling to and from work.

We would also propose that in lieu of productive days lost, to support employment and business, and "get the economy moving" the Sunday and Public Holiday double time rule be relaxed during lockdown. This will incentivise businesses to work 7 days a week but should still maintain protection for employees on the 40/45-hour work week.

We commend the presidency and government for their leadership at this time.

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