

**SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT**



**GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION UNIT**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**PEOPLE RESPONDS TO PRIME MINISTER'S "RETURN HOME" CALL**

Solomon Islanders are responding positively to the Prime Minister's call for people to return to their respective provinces as a measure to prevent contracting the Coronavirus (COVID-19) if it hits Honiara city.

Immediately after Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare made the call in his national address on Thursday night, people, who are mostly unemployed began boarding boats traveling to their home provinces in numbers.

Over the weekend, large numbers of people, including students who went on an early school break have been traveling home as a safety measure to avoid contracting the virus if it arrives in the country.

Prime Minister Sogavare in his address said the Government may not have the capacity to deal with a COVID-19 outbreak, which, makes it necessary for our citizens to head home.

Good progress is also achieved in many of the priority action areas identified by Prime Minister Sogavare in this address to the nation.

As a result of these latest measures, only the Honiara International Airport and the Honiara and Noro Seaports are still open to international flights and shipping services for essential goods.

The latest measures have also resulted in a ban on all non-citizens and non-residents from entering Solomon Islands, which is a measure already implemented by most countries.

The latest measures have permitted returning Solomon Islands citizens to enter the country, but they must now go through a mandatory 14-day institutional quarantine before they are cleared to go home. The quarantine period is necessary to allow health authorities to monitor incoming travelers' conditions and those developing symptoms of the virus will be appropriately dealt with.

The Government has closed all Schools in Honiara and Guadalcanal Province as of Friday 16 March. All food markets in and around Honiara city have been closed while only the Central Honiara Market is now operating.

While these preventative measures have been heightened in past weeks, government authorities are also working on austerity measures to ensure pressures on the national budget are controlled in terms of spending.

Officials are currently reviewing and reprioritizing the national budget to be considered by the Cabinet later this week. The clear focus of the budget reprioritization is to prevent the virus from entering our shores, but in the event it does, the Government is also ready to effectively and efficiently deal with.

The government is collectively working to address immediate concerns relating to public health and safety while maintaining essential services and developing strategies to cushion the impact on our domestic economy.

Meanwhile, the government continues to call on all citizens to unite in the fight against COVID-19 by supporting and appreciating the efforts of officials to prevent the virus from reaching our shores.

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