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MEDIA RELEASE

COMMEMORATING THE EASTER HOLIDAYS RESPONSIBLY AND WITH VIGILANCE TO STAVE OFF THE THIRD WAVE

Johannesburg, Wednesday, 31 March 2021 – Data from around the world suggests that COVID-19 infections are on a rapid increase. South Africa's medical fraternity has been sounding the alarm for weeks, about the possible impact of a lack of vigilance and non-adherence to the COVID-19 safety protocols during the Easter holidays, on the country's COVID-19 infections and a possible third wave.

In a few days South Africans will join millions of people around the world who will be celebrating the annual Easter holidays. In 2020 South Africa was on level 5 of the nationwide lockdown, in 2021 we have just commemorated 365 days in the lockdown and are presently on alert level 1.

With an intent to create awareness around the continued need for vigilance and responsible behaviour, the Solidarity Fund hosted a multi-stakeholder webinar around the theme: *"Preventing the Next Wave: The Need for Social Cohesion Before the Easter Holidays."*

Stakeholders included: The South African Council of Churches, the National Liquor Traders Association, FEDHASA, Department of Transport and SANTACO.

Reflecting upon the webinar, Tandi Nzimande, CEO of the Solidarity Fund said, "Appreciating that Easter is one of the most significant holidays on the Christian calendar, and that it coincides with other religious holidays in other faiths, we came together as stakeholders to urge responsibility and vigilance over the holiday period."

"The desire to spend time and commemorate this period with family, friends and community, while important, may also create the conditions for super-spreader events which may bring on the third wave of the pandemic in South Africa. South Africa cannot afford a third wave and we all need to play our part to prevent this," said Nzimande.

The Secretary General of the South African Council of Churches, Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana said, "We understand that people would want to celebrate the Easter holidays as they have done in the past, particularly with us having been in a hard lockdown in 2020. However, we are calling on all South Africans to please exercise vigilance and to adhere to the COVID-19 safety protocols during this time. Our commemoration of this special time should not give rise

to super spreader events. Our healthcare workers have also been under tremendous stress dealing with the pandemic over the past year and a third wave of the pandemic will add a lot of pressure to the healthcare sector.”

“In addition, we want to add our voices to call on South Africans to play their part and adhere to the proper wearing of masks, covering the nose and mouth even when in the company of friends and family, avoiding large gatherings, ensuring good ventilation, especially when using public transport and maintaining social distance. This is a call to a spirit of human solidarity - I am because you are, you are because I am - the essence of ubuntu-botho, a culture of mutual care,” concluded Mpumlwana.

The Liquor Traders Association Convenor Lucky Ntimane said, “We are adding our voice to the range of stakeholders in the country calling on all South Africans to play their part in behaving responsibly and with vigilance over the forthcoming holiday period. We have seen that increased restrictions to manage the spread of the virus, has affected the alcohol industry very severely. While we are committed to working with government to ensure we are part of the solution, we also call on South Africans to please play their part to ensure we do not create super spreader events which will bring on the third wave of the pandemic.”

Dr Nkosinathi Sishi, Deputy Director General of the Department of Transport said, “We have been mindful of the fact that as we move people as they go about their lives, we also create the conditions for the virus to spread. As a sector, we must be very vigilant to ensure we are not part of fueling super-spreader events. We are seeing a trend of rising infections across the world as people move to celebrate the Easter holidays with family and loved ones. We want to play a constructive role in keeping the economy open and moving people, hence our concerted compliance with the COVID-19 safety protocols.”

Thabisho Molelekwa, Chief Strategic Officer of SANTACO said, “As the sector, we have understood from the beginning of the pandemic the role we can play in moving the virus since COVID-19 moves when people move. We have therefore instituted very strict controls and implement the COVID-19 safety protocols very seriously. We call on all South Africans who use our taxis to please play their part as well as they travel to their homes and families over the holiday period.”

Rosemary Anderson, National Chairperson of FEDHASA said, “The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the issue of lives vs livelihoods and this is a constant struggle in the fight against the pandemic. A year of co-existing with the pandemic has shown us that the struggle continues to be ever-present. This Easter holiday period, we want to urge South Africans to remember that it is our behaviour that will impact on how successful we are in saving both lives and livelihoods. The virus moves when people move, and we can limit this by travelling only when it is necessary and adhering to the COVID-19 safety protocols.”

The webinar concluded with all partners emphasising their commitment to working with government and other stakeholders to strengthen and reinforce efforts to stave off a third wave of the pandemic with the ultimate goal of saving lives and livelihoods.

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