

BUSINESS FOR SOUTH AFRICA WELCOMES RISK-ADJUSTED REOPENING OF THE ECONOMY

- *Supports stringent health and hygiene protocols for all public and private sector activity*
- *Calls for evidence-based interventions balancing health, economic recovery and societal impact*
- *Commends the commitment of health workers and volunteers in the fight against COVID-19*

Johannesburg, 25 May 2020: Business for South Africa (B4SA) supports President Ramaphosa and the Cabinet's decision to continue the phased and risk-adjusted transition of South Africa to Level 3 which enables more businesses and public services to function. This will ensure fewer jobs are lost, more services are delivered, and our socio-economic recovery can enter a new phase.

Business commends the work and sacrifice of healthcare workers who are toiling tirelessly to increase public and private healthcare treatment capacity.

B4SA's Martin Kingston said: "As business we believe the ability for any country to deliver better comprehensive health outcomes for all citizens is dependent on a functional society and economy. This means balancing health and economic activity. Wherever possible, every part of South African society – whether the State, business, NGO or individuals, must work in the safest possible manner. Tragically, COVID-19 will afflict the world and our country for many years to come. Infections and mortalities will rise, but so too will the number of our people who have beaten the virus as our capacity to respond increases."

To sustain the impetus for a functional economy we must take practical risk adjusted steps, due to our current circumstances, ultimately to secure the health of South Africa's people. The restart of the economy needs to be from a different premise, one where everyone is willing to adapt to fight COVID-19. The consistent use of non-pharmaceutical interventions (masks, hand washing and sanitising, social distancing) must become second nature for every individual and every organisation. We must all ensure that working practices are adapted to meet the health, safety, and hygiene protocols required to combat COVID-19.

Said Kingston: "The safe reopening of our economy requires behaviour change from all of us. Because we can expect to live with the virus for an extended period of time, we will have to change the way we conduct our lives. We need to embed the health and safety protocols, and these must become part of our everyday lives".

Tools and guidelines to expedite a safe, effective and structured return to work plan have been communicated (<https://www.return2work.co.za>), while additional safe transport recommendations and protocols to minimise the prospect of transmission and enable the accelerated opening of the economy have been proposed to government.

We need to quickly restore far more people's capacity to earn and enable businesses to function. Failing that, government revenue will fall further and larger-scale job losses and more business failures will become inevitable. B4SA is therefore of the firm view that the current rate of economic decline can be slowed further by a rapid progression through Level 3, while embedding health protocols throughout society in public and private sectors. There remains an absolute necessity for further swift easing of economic restrictions. This can only be done against risk adjusted and evidence-based policy, accompanied by strict health and hygiene measures across all aspects of daily life and by limiting the movement of people where practical.

Additionally, as the country's education sector enters its phased re-start process, it will place an added burden on society and business. There is an imperative to ensure that core educational content is delivered in order not to waste an academic year and, wherever possible, business must accommodate the needs of parents so that we can support learners and families with their emotional, health and safe wellbeing.

Kingston concluded, "The strong and collaborative partnerships and dialogue underway between government, business, labour and civil society are resonating, and this will significantly strengthen our ability successfully to protect the health of both South Africa's people and the economy. In the spirit of social solidarity, we also call for good governance, transparency and ethical practice from all social partners in their response to COVID-19".

While the challenges South Africa face in addressing the COVID-19 crisis will pass, rejuvenating our economy and rebuilding society will require our collective focus in the future to accelerate inclusive economic growth and employment.

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ABOUT BUSINESS FOR SOUTH AFRICA

B4SA is structured into three core work groups, Healthcare, Labour and Economic Intervention, and these all have numerous workstreams with activities being implemented in a structured and considered manner. These are further underpinned by a comprehensive risk assessment and mitigation plan, and engagement with civil society, while reinforced by legal, regulatory, tax and communication initiatives.

The **Healthcare work group** (led by Stavros Nicolaou) has as its core mandate to support the national response, including Government and the private sector's public health efforts.

The **Labour work group** (Robert Legh) is addressing matters relating to the impact of the lockdown on employment and labour relations, where organised business may have a role to play.

The **Economic Intervention work group** (Martin Kingston) aims to align Government policy makers with industry experts, acting as a feedback mechanism from business to Government, and communicating information, actions and policies to the business community.

Risk assessment (Norman Mbazima). An important element of this process, ultimately to ensure its success, is an assessment of strategic risks and mitigations. This will help manage the risk clusters and enable prioritisation of the mitigation measures across the entire network.

Civil society intervention (Nolitha Fakude). This group, working in collaboration with Nedlac and other civil society formations, is providing the interface between B4SA and civil society, with the partners currently outlining and agreeing the priority areas of integration and focus as well as identifying opportunities for synergies, alignment and areas of leverage for collaboration.

Legal, Regulatory and Tax (Glenn Penfold). This is a collaboration amongst contributing law firms providing support to all the B4SA initiative. The work group collaborates with business, partners and Government in facilitating a conducive and enabling regulatory environment during the national response to the pandemic.

Communication (Phumzile Langeni and Busisiwe Mavuso). This group is advancing the development of a stakeholder engagement strategy and has established and implemented regular business member



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communication. It supports a public communications capacity and has created an interface for ongoing interaction between Government and B4SA workstream leads.

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