Afghanistan seeks to quarantine any coronavirus cases

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Afghan health authorities are establishing isolation wards across the country ahead of a potential influx of coronavirus cases, an official said Sunday, as governments worldwide monitor the disease's spread.

No cases have been recorded in Afghanistan so far, and the war-torn country's health services have set up screening units at airports and borders, public health minister Ferozuddin Feroz said.

"We have put serious measures in place," Feroz told reporters.

He said that in Kabul, authorities have created a 100-bed isolation ward, and another 200 or so beds will be made available across the country in Afghanistan's creaking hospitals.

Feroz said 262 people—including 233 Afghans—who flew into Kabul's airport from China during the past week had all been screened, and health officials have remained in contact with them to check on their health.

About 40 Afghan students are currently in Wuhan—the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak in neighbouring China. Feroz said the Afghan government had a chartered plane at the ready to bring them home if needed.

Coronavirus is similar to the SARS pathogen and has killed more than 300 people in China and spread around the world since emerging in

Wuhan.

On Sunday, China's National Health Commission said more than 14,000 people have been infected by the novel coronavirus.

Outside mainland China, there have been more than 100 infections reported in more than 20 countries.

The World Health Organization has declared an international emergency over the outbreak.

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