

# Lagos in lockdown as Africa virus closures spread

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Africa's largest city Lagos appeared deserted Tuesday after Nigeria locked down its economic hub and shuttered its capital in the continent's latest effort to brake the juggernaut of coronavirus.

Businesses were closed, markets abandoned and streets empty as the usually chaotic megacity of 20 million, along with the capital Abuja, shuddered to a halt on the first full day of a two-week shutdown.

Police in protective equipment manned checkpoints, trucks carrying non-essential items were turned back and youths were spotted playing football on a usually traffic-clogged highway.

"It is like putting people in prison," minibus taxi driver Mutiu Adisa told AFP.

"I don't know how people can survive for two weeks without working to make money."

Nigeria embarked late Monday on one of Africa's most ambitious efforts at social distancing after recording 135 confirmed cases and two deaths.

Enforcing the stay-at-home order in the overcrowded slums of Lagos will be a mammoth challenge as millions of poor depend on their daily earnings to survive.

Officials insist the draconian measures are needed urgently to ward off an explosion in infections that could swamp the weak health system in Africa's most populous nation.

"To reduce the number of people with coronavirus, we know they need to stop movement," 60-year-old engineer Ogun Nubi Victor told AFP.

"But there is no money for the citizens, people are just sitting at home, with nothing to eat."

In an attempt to ease the pain, Lagos state authorities have pledged to supply basic food rations to 200,000 of the city's neediest households.

## **Lockdowns and brutality**

Across all of Africa, countries have recorded more than 5,700 cases and 190 deaths, according to a tally compiled by AFP.

The numbers have lagged behind those of other continents, and there are still a handful of countries that had yet to detect a single case.

But experts have repeatedly warned of Africa's vulnerability, describing its many conflicts, poor sanitation, packed urban slums and under-equipped hospitals as sources of potential catastrophe.

Tanzania, Botswana and Mauritania on Tuesday became the latest nations to register fatalities, while Burundi reported its first two cases and Sierra Leone confirmed its first as well.

Ethiopia postponed general elections due on August 29 owing to the outbreak and said a new date would be given "when the pandemic is over".

In Central African Republic—a country ravaged by years of fighting—there are only three respiratory ventilators for a population of 4.7 million, the Norwegian Refugee Council said.

Dozens of countries across the continent have imposed restrictions from night-time curfews to total shutdowns to try to halt the disease.

Uganda on Tuesday woke up to lockdown after President Yoweri Museveni ordered his East African nation to shut up shop, while Botswana ordered a state of emergency from midnight on Thursday.

Guinean President Alpha Conde ordered a night-time curfew in a country already mired in political crisis over suspicions its leader is trying to cling to power.

Oil-rich Angola saw strict restrictions imposed since Monday.

"Nobody was ready for this," lamented local resident Osvaldo Malungo as he shopped for food at a market in the capital Luanda.

Growing reports of brutality from security forces in some nations have highlighted the challenges of enforcing curbs on movement.

The police watchdog in South Africa, on lockdown since last week, said Monday it was investigating an officer for allegedly killing a man who defied the regulations.

The country's defence minister also condemned "any type of abuse" by security forces after videos on social media showed civilians forced to squat or roll on the ground.

The regional powerhouse, which has the highest numbers of confirmed infections on the continent, will start door-to-door screening and testing

for infections, President Cyril Ramaphosa said Monday.

The "unprecedented" exercise will be launched in the next few days, with at least 10,000 field workers deployed across the country of 57 million people, he said in an address to the nation.

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