

Morocco tells people to stay home to contain virus

March 18 2020

Morocco on Wednesday urged residents to stay home in an effort to contain the novel coronavirus, as a minister warned the country was in "economic hibernation".

The North African country has reported 49 COVID-19 cases, including two deaths.

In a statement, the health and interior ministries told residents to "limit their movements" except in cases of "absolute necessity" such as shopping, [medical treatment](#) or going to work.

The steps bolster existing measures including the suspension of international flights and maritime passenger arrivals, and the closure of schools and universities, restaurants and cafes, cultural and sports facilities, and mosques.

Finance and Economy Minister Mohamed Benchaaboun told lawmakers Wednesday that the country was in "economic hibernation" and the measures taken were to combat the risk of "great social problems".

He said the government would take fiscal steps on Thursday to help those who have had to stop work so they could "at least meet their daily needs", and to assist businesses.

Many companies, including Morocco's Renault production site, have suspended activity this week, affecting "tens of thousands of jobs", while

the country's crucial tourism sector is "at a complete halt", the minister said.

Over half of employees in Morocco do not have a work contract and less than a quarter are covered by social security, while the country's informal sector represents over a third of jobs and more than 40 percent of GDP, according to various studies.

With the closure of cafes, restaurants, tourists sites and other venues, tens of thousands of people, including many in precarious, unofficial employment, have had to stop work, local media reported.

Authorities had already announced the release of a special fund of 10 billion dirhams (over \$1 billion) to upgrade medical equipment and help cushion the economic impact of the pandemic.

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