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'Papua New Guinea is not prepared': 4,000 nurses to strike over Covid-19 readiness

Friday 3 April 2020, by [TOGIBA Lyanne](#) (Date first published: 30 March 2020).

Thousands of nurses expected to stop work this week over concerns about lack of personal protective equipment

Four thousand nurses are expected to participate in strikes across [Papua New Guinea](#) this week over concerns that the Pacific nation lacks the medical supplies and funding to handle a potential coronavirus outbreak.

The industrial action follows a sit-in by nearly 600 nurses in the capital of Port Moresby on Thursday over concerns about the lack of personal protective equipment for medical staff.

Gibson Siune, the general secretary of the PNG Nurses Association said the majority of the association's members, which represents roughly 20% of the country's nursing workforce, would participate in the protests for as long as it took until their concerns were heard by the national government.

"Around 4,000 nurses throughout the country are expected to participate in this protest," he said.

The country recorded its [first confirmed case of Covid-19](#), an imported case from a foreign mine worker who has since been sent to Australia for treatment. A 14-day state of emergency came into effect on Tuesday imposing a curfew on the country's roughly eight million residents and restricting travel across the country.

The state of emergency has also imposed significant restrictions on who can speak to the media, with many doctors saying they were forbidden from discussing issues with the Guardian.

A senior doctor, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, told Guardian Australia: "PNG is not prepared to fight the virus simply because it does not have the funds to do so.

"The national government must come clean on the financial front and tell the people whether there is money available to fight the coronavirus or not, because currently almost all hospitals lack basic medical supplies to attend to ordinary illnesses in the country."

Residents in Port Moresby have also come out expressing concern about the possible shortage of food and other basic necessities in shops and markets, as the country went into lock down.

One resident told Guardian Australia: "I don't think the lock down is a good idea, as many of our people are going into panic buying while other unfortunate ones are unable to do that now because they simply do not have the money to buy extra food and basic supplies."

In response to the sit-in protest by nurses, prime minister James Marape gave assurances to the

nurses and doctors that PPEs will be made available to them this week.

Marape has also assured Papua New Guineans that food and basic supplies will not run out and that they should not panic and that the national government is doing all it can to protect the people and ensure there are no new cases of the virus in the country.

Like other Pacific Island countries, it is fighting hard at keeping its first case at just one, while also trying to ensure there is no local transmission.

The prime minister, James Marape, said when parliament is recalled next Thursday, “two bills will be enacted as Emergency Laws and they are the proposed Emergency General Provisions Bill 2020 and the Proposed Emergency Defence Force COVID-19 Bill 2020.”

The deputy director of the PNG Institute of Medical Research, Dr Moses Laman, said the institute in Goroka, Eastern Highlands Province, is fully capable of testing for the Covid-19 as it is accredited by the World Health Organization.

“There is really no need for test samples to be further verified in Australia, however depending on the case and upon request from the National Government, samples are sent for further checks like the first confirmed case.”

Health Minister Jelta Wong said there are currently 580 testing kits available in the country, and another 4,000 will arrive over the next week.

“PCR testing equipment has arrived in Port Moresby already and is undergoing optimisation, by 1 April testing should begin with 200 tests per day. The Central Public Laboratory should come online on 8 April with another 200 tests per day, so collectively there will be 700 tests conducted per day in the country.”

The Bomana Immigration Centre is among two other facilities being considered to be used as isolation units for coronavirus cases in Port Moresby.

The police minister, Bryan Kramer, said “the centre is an extremely new modern facility built by the Australian Government which is being considered among the others at Six Mile and the Rita Flynn courts.”

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The Covid-19 pandemic has generated interlocking crises at multiple levels. ESSF is providing thematic and geographic coverage in English and French.

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We have also selected a few articles with a global [political](#) analysis, as well as a few articles tracking the emergence of global progressive [movements](#) related to the pandemic.

We are increasing our coverage of left parties' and movements' declarations and proposals. See for example these pages for the [European Union](#) countries.

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