Media Statement
09th April, 2020

Good Afternoon Papua New Guinea, My people of East New Britain and specifically my people of Gazelle. It has been 2 days since we received the recent news of a COVID-19 positive case, this is technically the first case of community transmission – a local 40 year old female in East New Britain province.

I know there is a lot of fear and anxiety, which are normal human responses – but I urge you all to trust the process, and what our government has set up to deal with this global health crisis that has reached our shores.

Thankfully, our patient is recovering well and our team are in constant communication with her – monitoring her isolation and ensuring she will return to full health in the not too distant future. I thank her family and community for cooperating with our health team.

The case returned a positive result on the 6th April, and that very night - our rapid response and surveillance team were deployed to assist the ENB PHA with contact tracing and immediately started identifying her recent movements. The surveillance team identified 9 family members, 9 work contacts, 10 Health care workers and identified a further 9 associates for testing, that’s a total of 37 persons of interest. These POI’s joined the batch of 168 samples that were being worked on by our team at IMR.

As the virus has a 14 day incubation period, we need to clearly get the message out to all our people that the best way to protect your families is to STAY HOME. This means no sitting at the roadside telling stories, this means practising our faith at home within our families this Sunday, this
means only going to the shop or market for essentials - best option really is eat from your own garden right now.

This virus can affect anyone, but we need to look after those with other illnesses and our elderly as globally they are the most at risk of severe cases. Call 1800200 if you suspect you may have a case and we will send the team to that home in that village to check. I repeat, the Rapid Response Team will come to you, don’t go to the health center. This is to limit the risk of transmitting the virus to others.

A couple of days ago, our health care workers showed concerns around their safety and they have every right to be nervous as we have never experienced anything like this before. I understand they would by apprehensive.

They are the front line of this pandemic, and have undertaken refresher training with a large concentration on Infection Prevention Control also known as IPC. Our team at Nonga are committed to giving you the best.

We have dispatched an additional batch of PPE’s to Nonga to supplement the stock that was previously sent. The PPE include, Masks, Gloves, Gowns, Surgical Caps, Shoe Covers, Heavy duty gloves, spill kits and Biohazard bags.

A further 400 Universal Transport Mediums (UTM’s), which brings the quantity of test kits we have in province to 2880. This is vital for our strategy for containment and mitigation that we must have enough PCR Test kits on the ground.

I want to encourage you all to show support to your community, lets stick together and make sure we are all safe. We can do our own little bit to help ourselves, our family and our community.
We are the province that has lived through disasters that wiped out entire townships and villages, we are known for our resilience and sense of community to come back from difficult circumstances stronger.

Now in the face of a new threat, I call upon you all to lead the charge in getting this message through to every home you are responsible for and making sure our people know we are ready and we will support them through this. Now is not the time for fear, nor is it the time to slander or make fun of victims, its now time for strength, leadership and compassion.

Lastly, I want to wish my people of Gazelle, a Happy Easter. I understand this Easter is very different, we are unable to worship together like we always do. Personally, I have not seen my family for over a month now – as I am under the same restrictions imposed on you all. We are working 7 days a week – to try and protect our country, and our people.

It is time that we work on our connections with our individual family members, and although we cannot acknowledge our savior’s sacrifice for us all together – we can kneel at home and pray in private. I call on all Local Level Government Presidents and Ward Members to play their part to spread the message on COVID-19.

I offer one of my favorite Bible verses in Mark 12:30-31 Jesus said, “You must love the lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important; Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”
Let’s heed the word, let’s be leaders in our communities, and villages by looking after each other and passing on the 5 simple Key messages:

1. Wash your hand often with soap
2. Cough into your elbow
3. Don’t touch your face
4. Keep a safe distance from others
5. Simply Stay at Home.

If you want to truly help our team at Nonga – remember, the Virus Doesn’t Move Unless People Move it. When we stop Moving the Virus Stops Moving.

God bless you all, and Happy Easter. Bona Marum. Atlu

Hon. Jelta Wong, MP
Minister for Health and HIV AIDS