**STATEMENTS**

**THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC**

I rise pursuant to Standing Order No.47 (1), to make a Statement on an issue of general topical concern regarding the Novel Corona Virus.

As the House may be already aware, the deadly virus that originated from Wuhan, China, is circulating internationally. Indeed, this House already deliberated on this topic via statements by Sen. Kasanga and Sen. Kwamboka last week on 19th February, 2020.

Much as this country has been fortunate for the time being, that there have been no known cases of infections since the three suspected cases were tested and cleared by the Ministry of Health, however, yesterday I was worried as a Senator. It worries me a lot that China Southern West Airlines plane carrying 239 passengers was allowed to land at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA). I am perturbed by the fact that this plane was from Guangdong, the province known to be the second leading coronavirus infection zone globally.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, to make the matter worse, it has since been alleged that we shall now have weekly flights landing from China. Are we joking? Are we really treating this matter seriously? The magnitude of this virus cannot be overstated since a total of 37locations internationally have been affected. More than 82,000 infections and almost 3,000 deaths have been reported.

In some countries, various forms of interactions with people coming from or going to China have been restrained. For example, the entire border between Russia and China, about 26,000 miles, has been closed. More recently, Israel has been reported to have turned away a plane that landed from Korea, only allowing Israeli passport holders to disembark.

First World countries and more developed nations have locked out flights to and from China. More than 50 countries have issued an entry ban on residents of China or foreign nationals who have visited China in the recent past and restricted issuance of visas. On the visa issue, India has suspended visas issued to foreigners from China since January, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, noting the gravity of the situation and the fact that none of the passengers from the China Southern West Airlines met the case definition for the Coronavirus; we cannot bury our heads in the sand and pretend that these passengers will heed the advice to self-quarantine. By the way, what is self-quarantine?

As Senators, we are accountable to our people. Our leadership is in question if we cannot hold responsible the relevant people who hold offices that are in charge of Kenyans’ lives and welfare. As evidenced from past cases of their mistreatment and racism against our countrymen who are under their employment---

It is also important to note that the Government has done nothing to bring back the more than 100 Kenyan students stranded in Wuhan, even when other countries have done everything possible to evacuate their nationals from China. In fact, yesterday when I saw that plane landing, I thought; wow, finally Kenyans are coming home. However, to see that it was people who were not even disclosed by the fact that they came from that province really shocked me. What guarantee is there that the Ministry of Health has the capacity to deal with mass infections, in the unfortunate event that this should happen?

Mr. Speaker, Sir, it is for these reasons that I wish to bring this matter to the attention of the Senate and appeal to the national Government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Health as well as the concerned authorities, to handle this matter judiciously and expeditiously. Let them do so with a view to ensuring that the country takes preventive and precautionary measures to mitigate the situation.

I would urge you, Mr. Speaker, Sir, to direct that the Standing Committee on Health summons the Cabinet Secretary for Health to appear before the Senate as soon as possible. This will enable this House to seek clarifications on behalf of the Kenyans that we represent.

Finally, in the United States of America, the President has appointed his Vice President to spearhead a taskforce to look into issues of mitigating this Coronavirus. Bill Gates also made a statement and said that in the event that this virus is not controlled, it will take the lives of 100 million Africans. So, we should not joke. We should not be putting the lives of our 47 million to risk because of our own commodity interest.

This is a Statement under Standing Order No.47(1) and may not require a lot of action. However, I request that since this House has been told--- I stood to raise this Statement because of what happened yesterday. With those few remarks, I thank you.