English Assignment

by

OKUNOYE IBUKUNOLUWA OLUWABUSOLAMI

19/SMS09/059

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY

GST 122

QUESTION: Write a report, of not more than two pages, on the Corona virus pandemic and the effects of the lockdown and restriction of movement on Nigerians.

According to the World Health Organization, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans in China in 2002 and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans in Saudi Arabia in 2012. The COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

This virus is said to have its origin in Wuhan, a city located in the People’s Republic of China, one of the world’s leading superpowers. Since then, there have been 2,478,634 confirmed cases recorded worldwide, with 170,389 deaths (as of 10.40 am, 21/04/2020). As tiny as this virus probably is, it has wreaked so much havoc in the global community, causing death, financial, mental as well as emotional trouble for so many. Health systems in most countries are overwhelmed by the seriously sick patients in hospitals, many of whom are on ventilators and nursed in intensive care units (ICU). Global and local economies stand at their worst in decades; the world economy is now declared to be in recession by the World Bank/IMF, and could eventually lead to the deepest depression since 1929.

A pandemic is a kind of epidemic; one which has spread across a wider geographic range than an epidemic, and which has affected a significant portion of the world population. There have been a number of pandemics since the beginning of the 20th century, including the H1N1 pandemic of 2009, the Spanish flu of 1918/19 (which did not originate in Spain), as well as flu pandemics in 1957 and 1968, and now the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019/20.

The first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus. This was after the World Health Organization listed Nigeria, among other 13 African countries, as high-risk for the spread of the virus. On 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen. This was when it was concluded that a stronger measure, social distancing, which was being implemented in countries overseas, was necessary in order to curb the spread and prevent it from doing too much damage to the country as a whole. Consequently, schools, as well as offices were ordered to close down to limit the instances of contact. Public religious activities as well as non-essential services were also asked to be stopped in various states. The federal government ordered a lockdown on Lagos, Ogun and the FCT Abuja, for an initial period of two weeks starting 11:59pm, 30 March 2020, now extended by another 2 weeks from 13 April 2020. Many other states applied various stay-at-home rules and closed their boundaries. All these were done to limit movement and prevent the disease from spreading further.

However, locking people down at home in the Nigerian context is like asking people to go hungry for the duration of the lockdown. More than 60 per cent of Nigerians survive on daily pay from menial jobs and petty trading. A lockdown means their means of daily livelihood have been locked down. The plight of private sector employees is no better, as many private employers have maintained a ‘no salary during lockdown’ stance, or at best a 50 per cent pay cut. Some have even completely laid the workers off.

Pangs of hunger will lead to widespread anger. Protests in different forms are already being seen within the communities. People are protesting against a lockdown without palliatives, against the high-handedness of law enforcement agents, and even rejecting all manner of palliatives that smack of insult to their intelligence, such as packs of food that are not enough to feed a family of six in 2 weeks being distributed to be shared among 60-80 families in a cluster. This protest mood that is brewing has the potential to transform into a movement that would pose a serious challenge to the lockdown if the hunger question is not resolved. It could also get a lot worse, there is a rise in places in Lagos and Ogun States where a layer of lumpen youth, pushed to extreme hunger by the lockdown, go on mass looting of shops and houses, carting away ordinary people’s food and belongings. Officials had arrested Emmanuel Imhoudu, a taxi driver in Abuja for flouting a ban on non-essential movement in the city. A magistrate court in the city found him guilty of three charges brought against him and sentenced him to jail, but gave him the option of paying $78 (£62) as fine and an apology on national television. In a video posted on social media, the visibly upset driver could be seen crying as he stripped himself of clothes to protest his arrest. "I have children, I have a wife to feed, it’s money I came to look for," he said in Pidgin. "You kept us at home, what do you want us to do. Hunger virus is more than coronavirus."

In addition, the pandemic has caused the price of crude oil (the mainstay of the Nigerian economy) to tumble to as low as below $20 per barrel, which has made a mess of the Nigerian federal government’s budget estimates for 2020; making salaries payment, debt obligations and other projections uncertain. This is clearly so because the price of crude oil, which contributes over 90% of Nigeria’s externally-generated revenue, is greatly reduced, and this signifies tough times ahead. The impact of this drastic reduction of crude oil prices on the Nigerian economy will be far-reaching. There will be delays in salary payment, pay cuts, retrenchments and casualization on a scale which would make the experience of the 2016/17 recession seem like child’s play. These far-reaching effects would cut across both the public sector and the private sector.

In a positive light however, the lockdown has brought families closer together. A popular Nigerian youtuber, with the account name “Layefa Beauty” recently posted a video log showing how she and her sisters have been bonding since the lockdown begun. She mentioned that their mother invited them all to come back home, and she noted that this was the first time in a long time that all the members of the family have been together and that she is enjoying this time.

It is hoped that sooner rather than later, the number of cases will reduce and it will be okay to lift the lockdown and continue living.