

Malema warns private hospitals — The Citizen 18March 2020

The EFF leader has warned anyone involved in the private healthcare system not to see this as a money-making opportunity.

EFF leader Julius Malema lent his support to President Cyril Ramaphosa in Cape Town on Wednesday morning while calling on businesses not to try to maximise profits out of the crisis.

He said the only way hospitals would avoid being “nationalised” during the crisis was if they fully cooperated with the health minister and give beds for sick people when needed. Ramaphosa was unable to contain his laughter while Malema mentioned nationalisation.

His comment can generally be understood as a call for private hospitals and other facilities to make themselves available for the treatment and possible testing of all citizens infected with Covid-19, whether they have medical aid, or the funds to pay for private care themselves, or not.

ALSO READ: [Total Covid-19 infections in SA jump to 116 overnight](#)

Government is currently in the first phase of rolling out a National Health Insurance system, a financing approach intended to “make sure that all citizens of South Africa (and legal long-term residents) are provided with essential healthcare, regardless of their employment status and ability to make a direct monetary contribution to the NHI Fund”.

Malema said on Wednesday: “We don’t want to see anyone taking advantage during this disaster to steal from the poorest of the poor.”

The National Health Laboratory Service has laboratories for testing services countrywide and there is also substantial private sector capacity. Lancet Laboratories on Monday published a [list of 51 locations](#) in seven provinces where people can find out their Covid-19 status.

PCR tests are expensive. On Monday, Lancet Laboratories was charging about R1,200 per test. An official at a competitor, Pathcare, told [GroundUp](#) they were charging R995.

“Private sector patients may be able to afford this, but most people will likely get tested by the state which doesn’t charge,” [GroundUp](#) reported.

The NICD reported on 16 March that state and private laboratories had conducted 2,405 tests.

“How much does it really cost a lab to do a PCR test? That’s hard to calculate because there’s the cost of the lab technician, the administrative systems and the chemical reagents and equipment. One estimate we received is that collecting the swab is about R50 and the chemical reagents cost about R100. But another estimate we received was R400.

“Any which way you look at it though, the price being charged by the labs probably includes a very handsome profit. It will be interesting to see if activists put pressure on them to drop the price,” added journalists James Stent and Nathan Geffen.

The EFF leader singled out companies making or selling products such as hand sanitiser and masks not to engage in profiteering and he called on people to avoid getting together.

“If you are not a close relative or friend, avoid going to funerals. We call on church leaders not to allow more than 100 people in churches.

“We are calling on our church leaders to work together to reduce the spread of this virus.

“Unity of purpose is necessary.”

The EFF is known for its policies of large-scale nationalisation, particularly of private assets such as land and banks.

Briefing media after his briefing with all political parties represented in the National Assembly, Ramaphosa had earlier said that all parties had agreed that the country was in an extreme situation requiring extraordinary measures.

He said all 14 parties were standing together across party political divides to advance the interests of the country and defending lives.

“We are united as the leaders of our country. This is unprecedented. We have not seen something as serious as this confronting our nation.

“We share a common desire to keep our people safe and mitigate the disruption to our economy and the lives and livelihoods of our people.”

Ramaphosa said everyone understood it was time to show leadership, through both actions and pronouncements and get all the people in the country mobilised behind the anti-virus efforts.

All were agreed that an exceptional response was needed, that needed to be immediate and sustained.

“I was truly humbled by the expressions of support for all the measures from all the political leaders.”

He said the country was not helpless and there was much that could be done to slow down the spread of the disease and bring the pandemic to heal.

“We agreed that all political parties must equally bear the responsibility of mobilising and communicating with our people. An effective and popular campaign depends on the provision of regular and accurate information from government that is transparent. That we have agreed to do.

“We need a heightened personal responsibility from all South Africans.”

He reiterated the need for hand washing, social distancing and avoiding public gatherings of more than 100 people. All political parties agreed not to have any large gatherings.

Ramaphosa pointed to “excessive alcohol use that increases the likelihood of infection” and spoke out against fake news and rumourmongering.

“As political parties we will want to work together from the same information sheet. The voices on this issue should cut across the various political parties and be non-partisan. This is an enemy we confront together to make sure we rid our country of coronavirus.”