

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NIGERIA PUBLIC STATEMENT

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Nigeria: Authorities must protect health workers on the frontline of COVID-19 response

- **Health workers not adequately protected**
- **At least 40 health workers tested positive for Covid-19**

The Nigerian authorities must ensure that health workers in the frontline of COVID-19 response have access to the protective equipment they need, said Amnesty International Nigeria today marking International Workers Day.

Brave health workers have been working in difficult conditions, providing health services in the fight against Covid-19. They face the risks of being exposed to the COVID-19 virus, stigmatization, separation from their families, mental health and other concerns.

“Across Nigeria, health workers are facing extremely difficult and unsafe conditions of work, such as shortages of personal protective equipment, dilapidated and overstretched health facilities, unfair remuneration and harassment by security forces,” said Osai Ojigho Director Amnesty International Nigeria

“Health workers have been describing the difficulties they face and the danger they confront to secure the health and lives of people in Nigeria. What the government must guarantee, is their protection. It is unacceptable that they continue to be put at risk.”

On 23 April 2020, it was reported that forty health workers tested positive for COVID-19 in Nigeria.

Amnesty International interviewed some health workers who raised concerns that health workers across Nigeria are working without adequate protections and in very difficult conditions.

“In the government hospital where I work, there is no running water for health workers to wash their hands. Doctors and nurses have to fetch water in a bowl, which is not sanitary,” a health worker told Amnesty International.

According to another health worker: “Surgical masks are not adequately available in the hospital where I work. Authorities contracted tailors to sew unsafe masks with local fabrics. Doctors and

nurses had to protest before they were given N95 masks. These masks are not adequately available. We have to wash the masks for repeated usage. Health workers are in danger. We work under deplorable conditions.”

Health workers are increasingly facing harassment from securities agents, despite having been granted exemption from the lockdown order, being essential workers. In April, doctors at the Federal Medical Centre, Asaba, Delta State, embarked on a strike over the harassment of health workers by security agents.

A doctor in the Federal Capital Territory told Amnesty International that some patients are being turned away from some hospitals because health workers do not have adequate personal protective equipment. “When a health worker is provided with adequate personal protective equipment, we will not be scared of attending to any patient, regardless of the symptoms they exhibit, and lives would be saved.”

Nigerian authorities must ensure that health workers are protected at this critical time.

Health workers must be provided with all necessary personal protective equipment (such as masks, gloves, gowns, hand sanitizer, soap, water), fair remuneration, appropriate working hours with healthy breaks, accurate and accessible information on COVID-19, training, and psycho-social support. Health workers must be given all the support they need to effectively do their jobs.

“Authorities must adopt appropriate measures and policies to protect health workers and minimize their risks of contracting Covid-19. For those who have been infected with COVID-19 following exposure in the workplace, the government must ensure access to adequate treatment and, where relevant, effective remedies and compensation,” said Osai Ojigho.

Background

The first case of COVID-19 was reported in Nigeria on 27 February 2020 according to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). As at 30 April 2020 by 6:00pm, Nigeria recorded 1728 cases across 34 states, including the Federal Capital Territory. The cases include 51 deaths.