

**PRESS CONFERENCE BY THE NDC CAUCUS IN PARLIAMENT ON OVERPRICED  
SPUTNIK V COVID-19 VACCINES ON THURSDAY, 24<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2021**  
**ADDRESSED BY MINORITY LEADER,**  
**HON. HARUNA IDDRISU**

Colleague Members of Parliament;  
Members of the Media;  
Ladies & Gentlemen;

Let me welcome you ladies and gentlemen to this afternoon's gathering. We intend to address two major issues of enormous public interest and national concern. They are:

- the scandal related to the procurement of Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccines; and
- the fleecing of the travelling Ghanaian public in the name of COVID-19 antigen testing.

As we all know, Ghana recorded its first two cases of COVID-19 in March last year. The NDC Caucus just like many medical experts, public health practitioners, civil society organisations and religious bodies are of the firm conviction that government general management and containment of the virus in Ghana could have been more efficient, could have shown better regard for science and data; could have cost the country far less and could have avoided the massive corruption that has been associated with Ghana's response.

As per the last update by the Ghana Health Service, Ghana has recorded 94,824 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with regrettably 790 associated deaths. These deaths include those of our heroic medical professionals, notable and influential persons within our communities, breadwinners of families, students, mothers, fathers and even children.

On the other hand, its impact on our economy has been devastating. As we speak, statistics from the Ghana Statistical Service gives a very bleak picture of the collapse of business in all sectors from agri-business through industry to services. Ghanaians have had to pay a heavy toll during this pandemic and there are several who may not recover.

It is for these and several reasons that we the Minority in Parliament have been on this government's heels from the onset trying to push as hard as possible to secure some support from this government for the ordinary man while also exercising our oversight responsibilities to ensure that the taxpayer is not short-changed.

From the very beginning, we supported government in many regard

- by fast-tracking the passage of the Imposition of Restrictions Bill into an Act. **An Act under which several powers were granted to the President and his administration to impose measures that affect the fundamental human rights of citizens all in the hope that government so empowered will put in measures for the general good of Ghanaians.**
- We also supported this government by facilitating, in record time, the law of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) National Trust Fund Bill. This Act was to receive contributions and donations from individuals, groups and corporate bodies to support the fight against the virus.
- In fact, a number of loan agreements were placed before Parliament and we joined the majority in approving several of those loans regardless of our reservations all in a bid to resource government to be able to fight the pandemic.

- These included the US\$1billion Rapid Credit Facility from the IMF, US\$130million from the World Bank under the Ghana Productive Safety Net Project and several others ensuring that per government's own 2021 Budget accounts for close to GHS19billion was approved to be utilised in managing the pandemic in Ghana.

Even this year, regardless of some concerns to certain elements in the budget, we once again worked well beyond normal hours sometimes in excess of 14 hours to ensure that the budget passed so government can get to the business of managing this country and combating the pandemic.

Instead, we have been inundated with excuses as to why our laws must be side-lined, our taxes and levies should be raised.

In the midst of excruciating hardships, massive corruption and Government negligence and incompetence leading to the failure to secure vaccines for Ghanaians.

Government's attitude now points to one of opportunism in exploiting the pandemic to aggregate wealth to family and friends. Naked and blatant opportunism that has led to a situation where we risk our longstanding mutual relations with our diplomatic partners so as to facilitate unconscionable profiteering. Government has rather in a bizarre twist preferred to deal with dubious middlemen of questionable character in its insatiable thirst to profit from vaccine acquisition as revealed by the Norwegian Newspaper, Verdens Gang (VG).

Even more shocking is the response from government in relation to the opaque and unconstitutional procurement of Sputnik V vaccines.

The Minister of Health at a Press Conference on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2021 justified the decision by the Ministry to purchase 3.4million doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine using a middleman, Sheik Ahmed Dalmook Al Maktoum of United Arab Emirates at a unit cost of US\$19 instead of US\$10. He explained that the Ministry had faced difficulties using country-to-country negotiations and other means to get the vaccine hence the reason for using an intermediary.

### **Our concerns**

This argument by the Minister is unconvincing to the Ghanaian populace because the decision to purchase vaccines from an intermediary does not guarantee the safety and potency of these vaccines for the people of this country.

Indeed, WHO has warned all countries including Ghana to desist from the purchase of vaccines using intermediaries because it has the tendency of resulting in sub-standard vaccines that can be harmful to our compatriots.

In any case, there still exists other channels such as the WHO, UNICEF, GAVI, COVAX etc. that can assist Ghana to obtain standard and safe vaccines set at a price far lower than the US\$19 per dose rip-off.

The Minority's own investigations into this Sputnik V scandal is that the Russian authorities have at all times been willing to deal directly with Ghana contrary to what the Akufo-Addo Government has been claiming. Indeed our checks indicate that the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) has opened direct engagements with over 30 Governments as at February this year including African countries such as Kenya, Rwanda, Tunisia, Guinea and Algeria. We have a copy of a statement RDIF issued in Moscow confirming this fact.

We have also established that the dubious middlemen government is dealing with have no authorization on behalf of RDIF or Russian authorities to hold themselves out as agents. At best, they are imposters.

The NDC caucus can also confirm that these middlemen made no efforts to engage the Russian Embassy when they arrived in Accra. Our government did not also contact them for any due diligence neither were Russian Embassy officials invited into the meetings with these shadowy characters.

It is worth pointing out that contrary to the claims contained in the official press release of the Ministry of Health dated 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2021, there is no Deputy Russian Ambassador in Ghana.

Even more troubling, the purported Vaccine Supply Agreement between Ghana's Health Ministry signed by Minister Kwaku Agyeman-Manu and H.H. Sheikh Ahmed Dalmook Al Maktoum on 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2021 violates Article 181 (5) of the 1992 Constitution which requires Parliamentary approval for international agreements of this nature.

It is totally unacceptable that President Nana Akufo-Addo, who has served as Foreign Affairs Minister, boldly chose to sidestep diplomatic channels and rather resorted to dealing with Russian Institutions through third parties when we have always had and maintained cordial bilateral relations with the Russian Government. It is also clear to us that our Foreign Ministry led by Hon. Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey have let this country down. The abysmal failure in leveraging historic diplomatic ties with the Russians at a time we in the Minority have unfettered access to the Russians is most embarrassing. She ought to be fired if she cannot meet the basic expectations of her office.

We are more incensed by the terms of these multiple illegal agreements which cruelly short-change Ghanaians by our government agreeing to pay \$19 to \$26 per jab of Sputnik V instead of the under \$10 other countries and multilateral agencies like the AU purchased the very same vaccine.

We the minority believe that this contract is not in the interest of Ghanaians and whether payments have been made or not, the contract is null and void and government must as a matter of urgency put in the necessary steps to abrogate the contract. We also intend to explore further avenues under our Constitution and Standing Orders to hold the Health Minister accountable for this graft of international proportions.

### **Frontiers Healthcare Services Limited**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have all heard of the recent response by the Minister for Transport to my urgent question, on how a private company – Frontiers Healthcare Services Limited chosen at the neglect of reputable public institutions such as Noguchi has raked in a colossal \$16.3m dollars for charging travellers US\$150 for the less sensitive and inferior antigen test. Sadly, Kotoka International Airport was handed a paltry \$1 million. Do note that these fantastic profits for Frontiers are just for the period September to December 2020. January to June this year has not yet been accounted.

### **Minister's Answers**

As you do know, this transaction was characterised by the Akufo-Addo trademark lack of transparency and regard for our laws. The Procurement law, Health Institutions and Facilities Act and the Fees and Charges Act were all breached to pave way for this hurriedly incorporated company without any track record whatsoever.

We have always been of the opinion that an institution like the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research should have been given that contract instead of a veiled foreign owned company whose ownership we cannot clearly delineate. But regardless of our calls for answers, neither the Minister of Health, the Ghana Health Service nor anyone in authority seems to know the processes that led to the award of that contract.

We wish to serve notice that the NDC caucus has prepared a motion demanding a bi-partisan parliamentary enquiry into the Frontiers affair. We are grateful for your time and attention. We shall now take your questions.