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18 May 2020

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Prime Minister Loughman thanks partners for providing COVID-19 testing capability

The High Commissioner of Australia HE Sarah deZoeten is joined by her New Zealand counterpart HE Jonathan Schwass and representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO) and The Pacific Community (SPC) to hand over 320 GeneXpert test cartridges to the Prime Minister of Vanuatu, the Hon Bob Loughman Weibur today Monday 18 May 2020.

The test cartridges which will enable testing for COVID-19 in Vanuatu arrived on a Royal Australian Air Force C-17 aircraft that landed in Port Vila on Saturday 16 May.

At the handover ceremony, Prime Minister Loughman thanked representatives from Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Community (SPC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) for assisting Vanuatu to finalise its preparedness to respond to COVID-19.

“My government and the people of Vanuatu also cherish the relationship we have with the people of your countries and the regional and international agencies which drives you to come forward and assist our nation in need when we are facing multiple disasters”, he said adding that Humanity is the most important value to think and act upon between friend countries in times of crisis.

The GeneXpert system is endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO) and can produce accurate results within 45 minutes. Vanuatu will now have the capacity to test for COVID-19 in-country and specimens will not need to be sent to overseas for results.

“I acknowledge the hard work of everyone involved in the Government of Vanuatu and our partners. Together we have worked to ensure Vanuatu has access to high-quality testing equipment to detect and combat COVID-19. We all stand with Vanuatu as it faces economic and health security challenges of COVID-19,” said Australia’s High Commissioner to Vanuatu, Her Excellency Sarah deZoeten.



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Prime Minister, the Hon. Bob Loughman Weibur, Minister of Health, Hon. Silas Bule, Minister of Climate Change, Hon. Bruno Leingkone, with Australia's High Commissioner to Vanuatu, H.E. Sarah deZoeten, New Zealand High Commissioner to Vanuatu, H.E. Jonathan Schwass, and representatives of the World Health Organization, The Pacific Community and Ministry of Health and Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials at the handover of COVID-19 testing cartridges.

The procurement and delivery of the testing equipment is a collaborative effort between Vanuatu, Australia, New Zealand, the Pacific Community and the World Health Organization.

The equipment was delivered on flights to the Pacific, through Australia's Pacific Corridor, in support of the Pacific Islands Forum's Pacific Humanitarian Pathway. The corridor is enabling essential services and humanitarian assistance to reach the Pacific amid global transport and border restrictions due to the pandemic. In doing this, partners are working with the Government of Vanuatu to ensure compliance with Vanuatu's strict COVID-19 quarantine requirements.

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