

Rising anti-Chinese sentiment tied to coronavirus epidemic



Geneva, February 3 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) says it does not recommend trade and travel restrictions in the wake of the new coronavirus outbreak. But that has not stopped at least 22 countries from imposing some form of travel restrictions on people coming from China.

That includes the United States, Israel, the Philippines, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, New Zealand and North Korea; Indonesia and Iraq have issued temporary travel bans on people travelling or transiting from the mainland.

China's neighbours like Russia, Mongolia and Nepal are closing their borders and checkpoints, while others are introducing stricter controls. Singapore, Vietnam, Russia, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan and Mozambique have temporarily stopped issuing visas to Chinese nationals. And nearly 40 airlines from across the world have stopped or partially suspending operations to and from China.

Anti-Chinese and racist sentiments appear to be spreading to communities big and small, due to ignorance and misinformation.

Members of the Chinese-Canadian community say fears about the spread of the disease -- around which misinformation is rife -- have also led to what they feel is an uptick in xenophobia in Canada, where three confirmed cases of the coronavirus have been confirmed so far.

A similar situation developed during the SARS outbreak in 2003. There were more than 8,000 reported SARS cases at that time, and the epidemic spread to 26 countries, including Canada, where 44 people died from the disease.

The Chinese Canadian National Council for Social Justice, a human rights group, said social media has become the place where "vile, racist comments" are festering around the current coronavirus outbreak.

Among the comments on-line: "Quarantine all Chinese until Chinese virus is gone" and "Stop immigration from China because they carry this disease." The brazen racism people displayed online is something observers say they did not see during the SARS outbreak.

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