

French president admits his country wasn't prepared for COVID-19



Paris, April 14 (RHC)-- France will remain locked down until at least May 11th, President Emmanuel Macron has revealed, calling on citizens to continue to respect the rules his government has imposed to slow the spread of coronavirus.

Macron announced the lockdown extension during a public address on Monday as the growth of the epidemic in France was appearing to plateau, with 574 new deaths declared in the preceding 24 hours.

Admitting the country had not been prepared for the outbreak, the French president nevertheless praised those in front-line occupations for working overtime to save lives and called on the French to continue to stay home and maintain social distancing. Economic assistance would be stepped up for workers in those sectors that had to remain closed, he added, promising a specific plan for the tourism, hotels, restaurant, and culture sectors.

Macron pledged that May 11 would represent “the beginning of a new step,” after which schools, daycares, and other educational institutions would be progressively reopened. At that time, “the vast majority” of French will be able to begin returning to work, he explained, though restaurants, cafes, and

other public gathering places would remain shuttered. Festivals and other large gatherings will remain postponed until at least mid-July. The situation will be reevaluated weekly.

Borders with non-European countries will remain closed until further notice. The government hopes to have face masks available for everyone by May 11, and their use by professions having frequent contact with the public will be mandatory.

France has been locked down since mid-March and has a total of 133,685 confirmed cases of coronavirus, ranking behind only the U.S., Spain, and Italy in terms of casualties. Almost 15,000 people have died with the disease, though the death rate among hospitalized patients has slowed over the weekend and the number of patients being treated in intensive care has declined for several days.

The French economy has taken a beating from the pandemic-induced shutdown, with the Bank of France recently reporting its worst first-quarter performance since World War II. The last two weeks of March specifically saw a 32 percent drop in economic activity, according to the central bank, which expects the economy to continue shrinking by 1.5 percent for every two weeks the nation spends under lockdown.

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