



Jahaly/The Gambia, April 19th, 2020

**Dear friends, dear supporters of our projects in The Gambia,**

in the sign of the Covid-19 pandemic that affects all of us, almost all of us are currently shifting the priorities of everyday life.

I have been in the Gambia with my wife and youngest daughter for six months. Our Gambian partner association Project Aid The Gambia tries to get involved as a partner of the Gambian government in the fight against the virus.

Seen from a distance, the situation in Germany after many human tragedies seems to be slowly improving to the extent that sufficient hospital beds and intensive care units can be made available for the difficult course if it continues to spread. Hundreds of thousands of tests are performed daily in Germany, and slightly more than 300 only in Gambia since February.

Measures that have been taken in Europe to contain the virus – such as to work from home or to stay at home - can hardly be implemented in The Gambia. As a rule, people cannot do their work from home. There is no social security system. Due to the miserable state of the state budget, it is not possible to pay short-time work benefits or to support affected companies from tax funds.

The ordinary population cannot shop in a supermarket. The people visit local markets and have to move in narrow streets between nested sales booths. Very few houses in the capital region have their own water connection. The further you get to the rural areas, the less often there is an own connection. People meet at public water supply points: wells, taps that have been set up by the government or by NGOs.

Water - an already invaluable commodity in this country due to the heat and drought - is extremely important in combination with soap when used against the corona virus.



Most people in The Gambia are Muslim and wash their hands and feet five times a day, as prescribed by Islam. However, this is more a spiritual cleansing, using only water.

There are therefore a number of logistical difficulties with the provision of water and soap. The use of high alcohol disinfectants that protect against the virus is out of the question. These items are scarce or very expensive.

The Gambia has so far registered ten official corona patients. One patient has died, two have recovered and seven are still in quarantine.

However, because of the few tests that have been carried out, these figures have no meaning at all - they are only registered as statistical accessories. How far an actual "infection" of the entire population has already taken place cannot be determined. In rural areas in particular, the dead are buried within a few hours. Existing symptoms are usually not checked.

At Jahaly Health Centre in Jahaly and at the health centre in Buniadu entrusted to us by Riverboat Doctors International e.V. are the only health centers in the country where patients are only allowed to enter the site when wearing a cotton face mask, which we provide. We also maintain a distance of two meters. We already informed you about this with our newsletter a few days ago. You can read the newsletter again by clicking [here](#).

On April 2nd I sent a letter to the Gambian Minister of Health, Dr. Samateh, and informed him about the use of the face masks in Jahaly and Buniadu and asked to start a national campaign for wearing masks.

Since then, the minister has been kept informed by me about new scientific findings and how other countries deal with this topic. The minister had always shown interest.

At a press conference last Friday, the Minister of Health has now announced that the Gambian government is now advising that self-made face masks be worn in public.

In the next few days we will therefore start a nationwide campaign together with other groups and organizations with which we already work with. It is our goal that the wearing of self-made face masks is not only recommended, but becomes mandatory. The risk of infection is only reduced if everyone wears a mask in public - and in addition to observing hygiene measures.

At the beginning of April we had the first four thousand masks made from cotton. The production of a mask costs twenty-five Gambian Dalasi - about fifty euro cents. We want to have a very large number of these masks manufactured and offer them for sale nationwide. The proceeds go entirely to the production of further masks. We want to make these masks available to poor families free of charge. We want to raise public awareness with a campaign on radio, TV, social media and information posters.

I ask all of you to open your pockets and hearts for this action. We need donations for start-up capital and running costs. There are about twenty intensive care beds in the Gambia, and as far as I know there are 3 (in words: three) ventilators.



Projekthilfe Gambia e.V.

If the epidemic spreads here as in certain areas of Europe, many people are at risk of death. Unrest and riots are feared.

I know that my appeal comes at a certain inappropriate time. I am addressing you all now, at a time when you yourself face enough problems. But I also know that you have supported our work in The Gambia for many years: Certainly also because you care about the people on this continent.

So if each of you makes a donation after reading this letter - online [here](#) - or directly to our donation account at

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Intended use: **Masks**

then we can start this campaign in a few days.

Please also distribute this letter to your relatives, acquaintances, friends. Every little amount helps. Let's try it together.

I once again greet everyone from The Gambia and hope that we will all see each other again in Germany or in The Gambia.

Matthias Ketteler  
(Board)

More information about why to wear a face mask: [www.maskonnnow.com](http://www.maskonnnow.com)

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